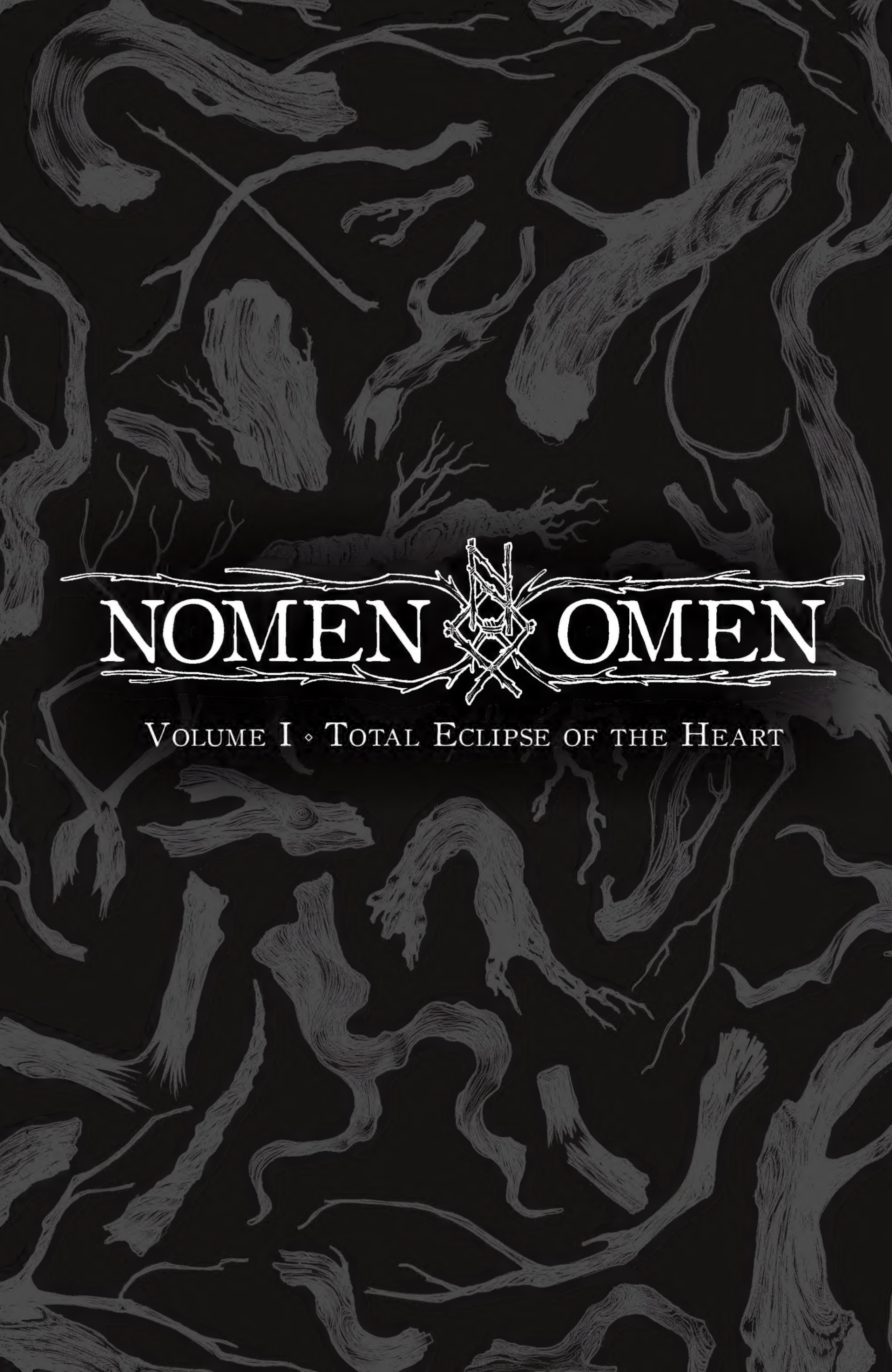
MARCO B. BUCCI

JACOPO CAMAGNI

NOMEN OMEN

VOLUME I ◇ TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE HEART

TRUST ME I'M A UNIC
ORME



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Volume I ◇ Total Eclipse of the Heart

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Readers of NOMEN OMEN,

I'm writing you a warning letter about the authors of this series, Jacopo Camagni and Marco Bucci.

My first meeting with them took place in 2017 at the Lucca Comics and Games festival, on a wet Autumn day. To tell you the whole story, two years earlier I had not given the best picture of myself in a virtual exchange, so Jacopo took me for a completely snobbish and unworthy soul, hence our interaction during a signing session at our common publisher's booth was as cold as an iceberg. As for Marco… Being the tireless verbal storyteller that he is, he was far too busy overwhelming people approaching their table with words to pay attention to me (and my astral predispositions made me hate it more than I hate the taste of beets).

But believe it or not, after this unpleasant first encounter in Tuscany, in a very short time Jacopo and Marco have become such precious friends that now I can say I would follow them blindfolded over any mortal precipice. There can be only one explanation for this: they have bewitched me. This is exactly why I feel the urge to warn you: through NOMEN OMEN, it is very likely that the same spell will hit you!

It could result in an addiction enchantment, or it may open a portal within you, or change your perception of gravity forever. This is a very hard delight to avoid because the ingredients that Marco and Jacopo brewed in their pot created a very powerful recipe. In NOMEN OMEN, magic, poetry and pop culture are one in the same language.

These two managed to introduce the idea that ancient magic and modern magic are part of the same continuum, thus making them inseparable. Concocting a way to blend the pagan mythological worlds with mainstream culture is no small feat either: here fauns shave their legs with their sickle between two games of *Labyrinth* pinball, while trolls dressed in *Harry Potter* T-shirts are more than often than not big computer geeks.

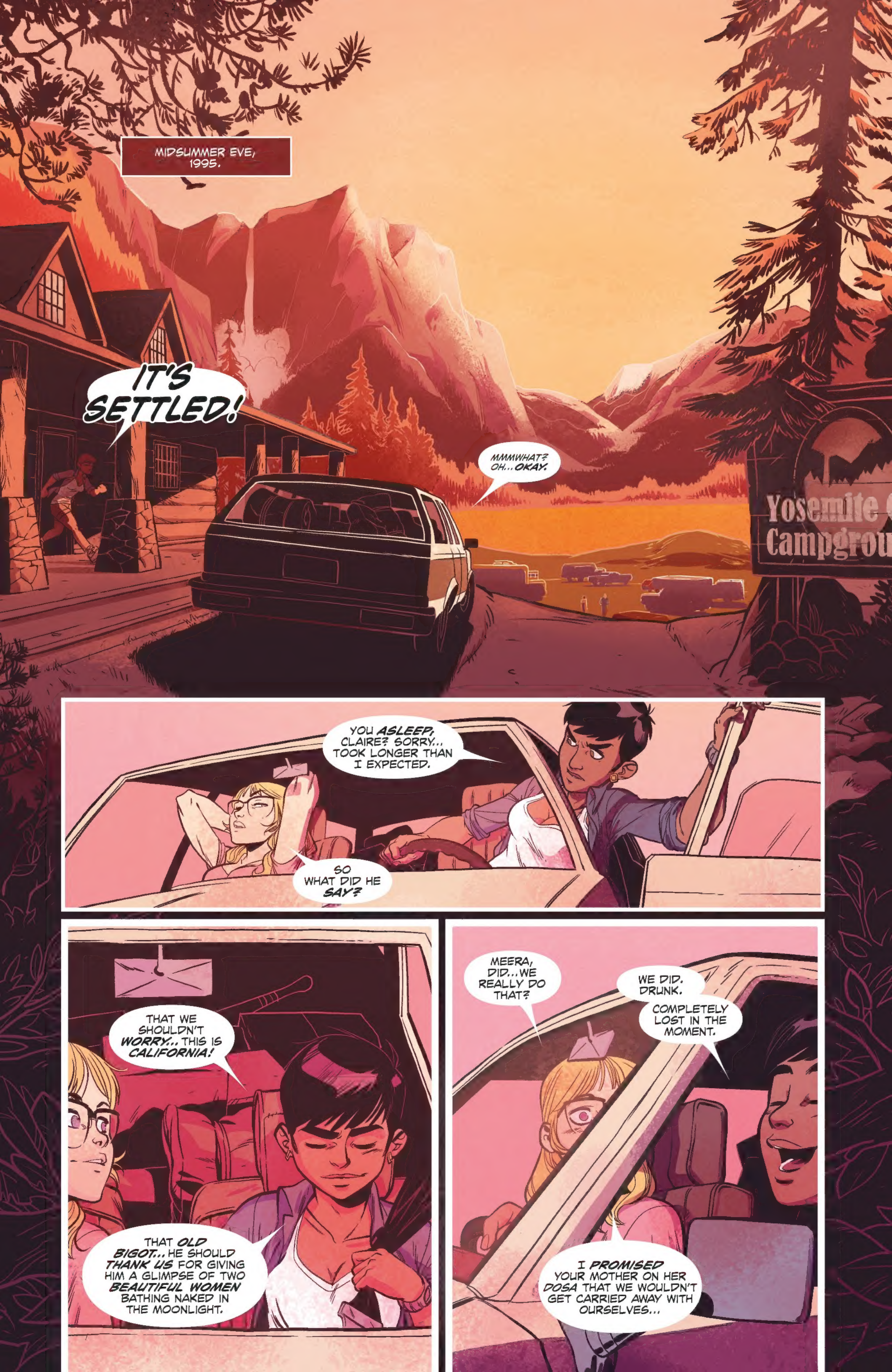
Thanks to their ability to understand alchemy and magic as a transformative art, with NOMEN OMEN Marco and Jacopo show that all the various kinds of networks we deal with in our everyday life make our era a decisive magic springboard, in the spiritual, energetic and divine sense, as they're all are based on one core notion: connection.

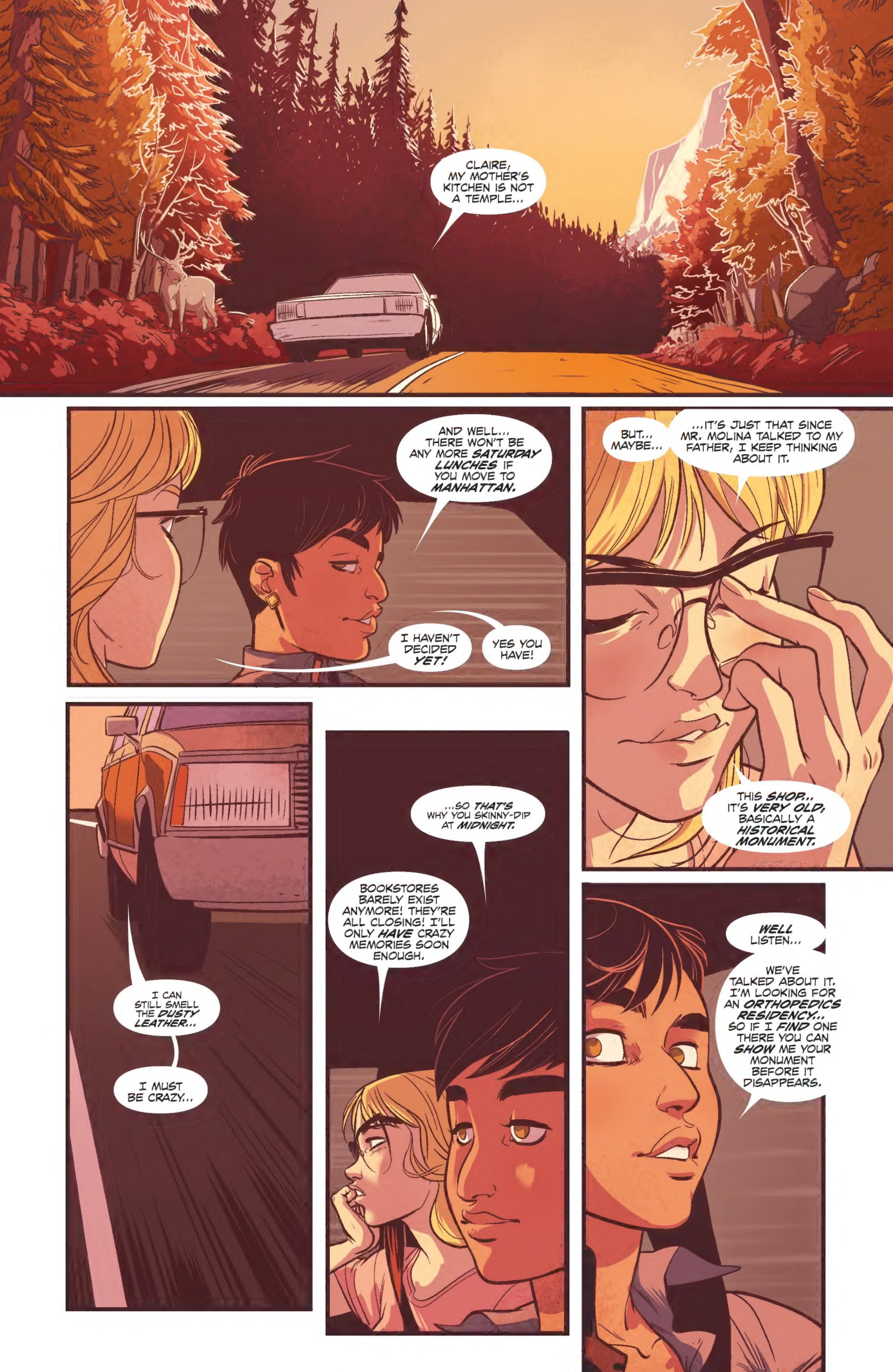
I have no advice to give you that would help ward off the narrative spell that will take hold of you. But don't you worry, this is still white magic or rather some kind of colored magic whose exact gamut you will discover as the chapters progress. In short: it's definitely not black magic. Actually, I can only wish you such a spell. Like the one I fell for two years ago, it's imbued with love for the magical and sacred dimension that resides in everyone.

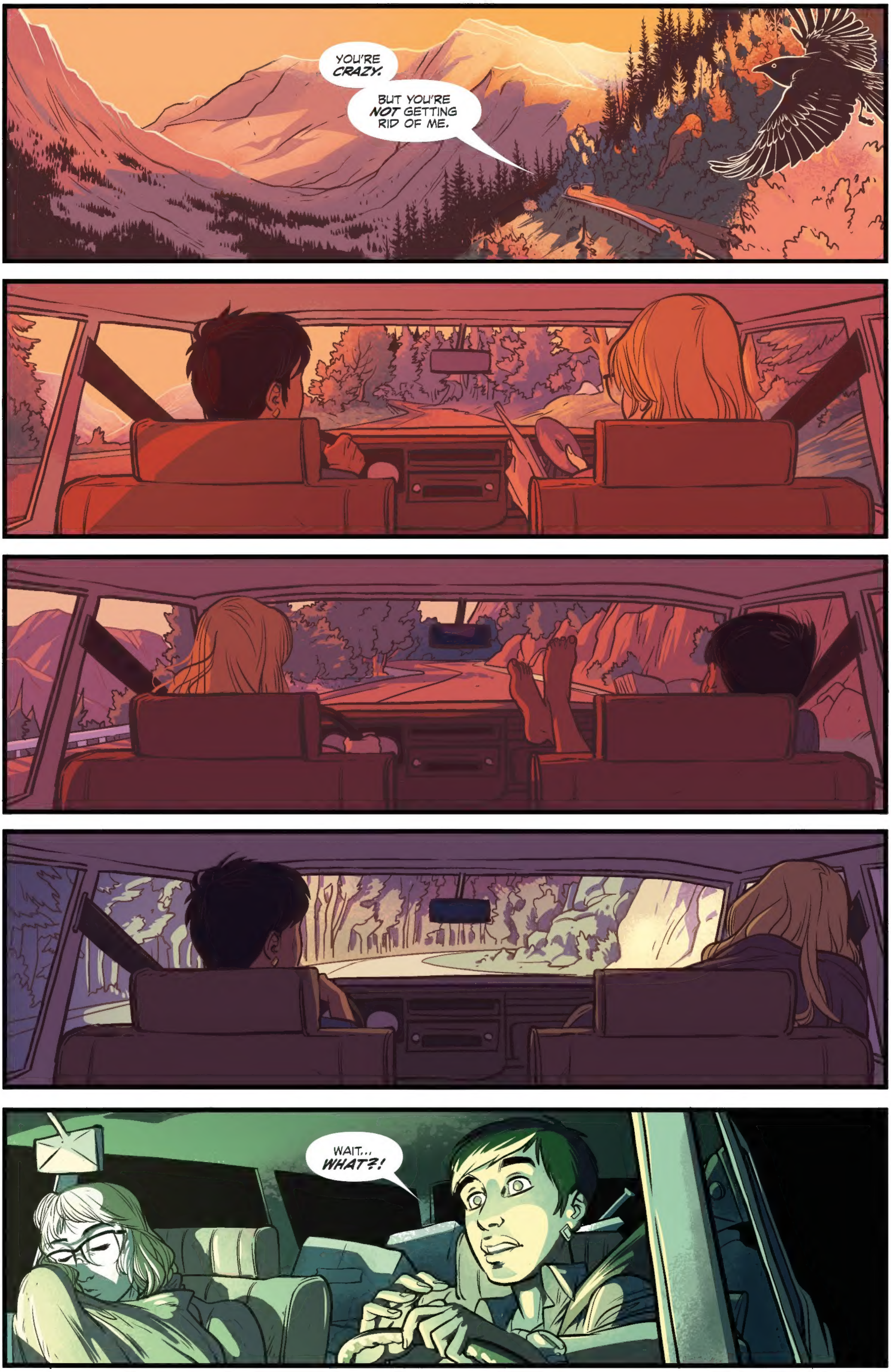
Julie Maroh
(Jul, for Jacopo and Marco)

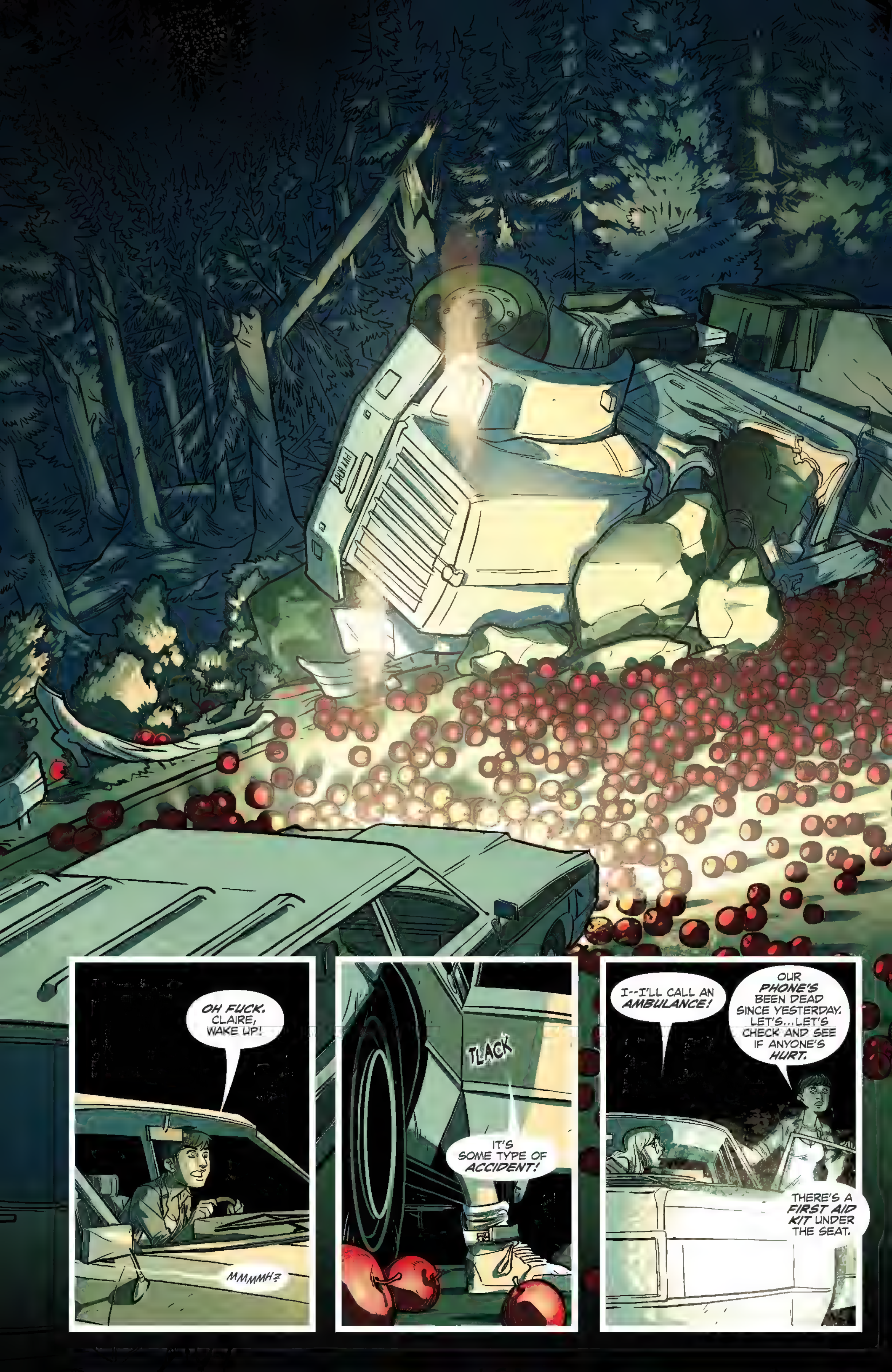
Julie Maroh is one of the most appreciated and acclaimed comic book authors in Europe. Aer first comic book, *Blue is the Warmest Color*, won the Audience Award at the Angoulême festival in 2011. Its movie adaptation won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes film festival in 2013. Some of aer best-selling graphic novels include *Body Music* (2017) and *Skandalon* (2013) and *You Brought Me the Ocean* (2020), an Aqualad OGN written by Alex Sanchez and published by DC Comics.

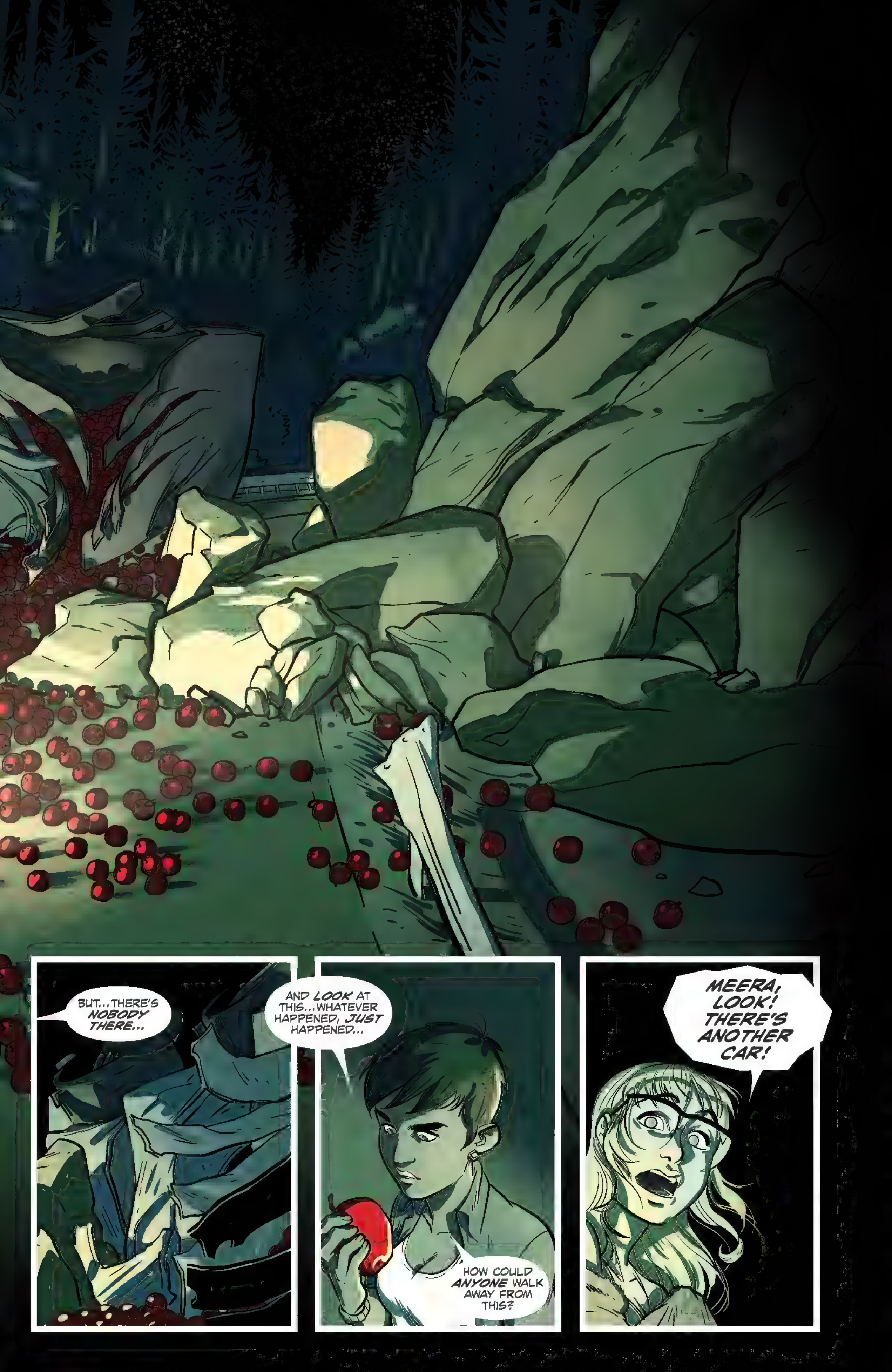
Chapter 1

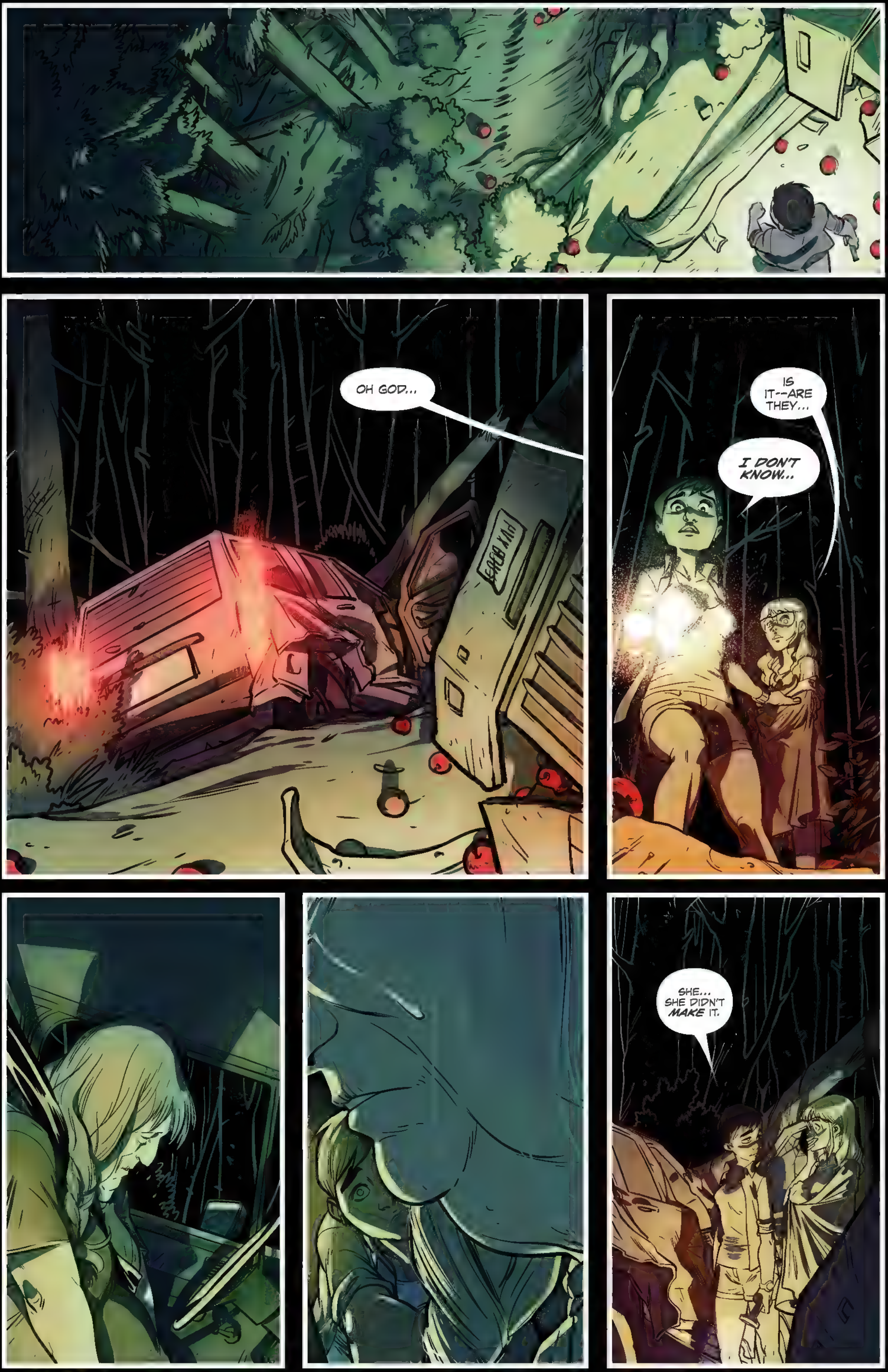

MIDSUMMER EVE, 1995.
IT'S SETTLED!
MMMWHAT? OH...OKAY.
Yosemite C
Campgrou
YOU ASLEEP, CLAIRE? SORRY... TOOK LONGER THAN I EXPECTED.
SO WHAT DID HE SAY?
THAT WE SHOULDN'T WORRY... THIS IS CALIFORNIA!
THAT OLD BIGOT... HE SHOULD THANK US FOR GIVING HIM A GLIMPSE OF TWO BEAUTIFUL WOMEN BATHING NAKED IN THE MOONLIGHT.
MEERA, DID...WE REALLY DO THAT?
WE DID. DRUNK.
COMPLETELY LOST IN THE MOMENT.
I PROMISED YOUR MOTHER ON HER DOSA THAT WE WOULDN'T GET CARRIED AWAY WITH OURSELVES...

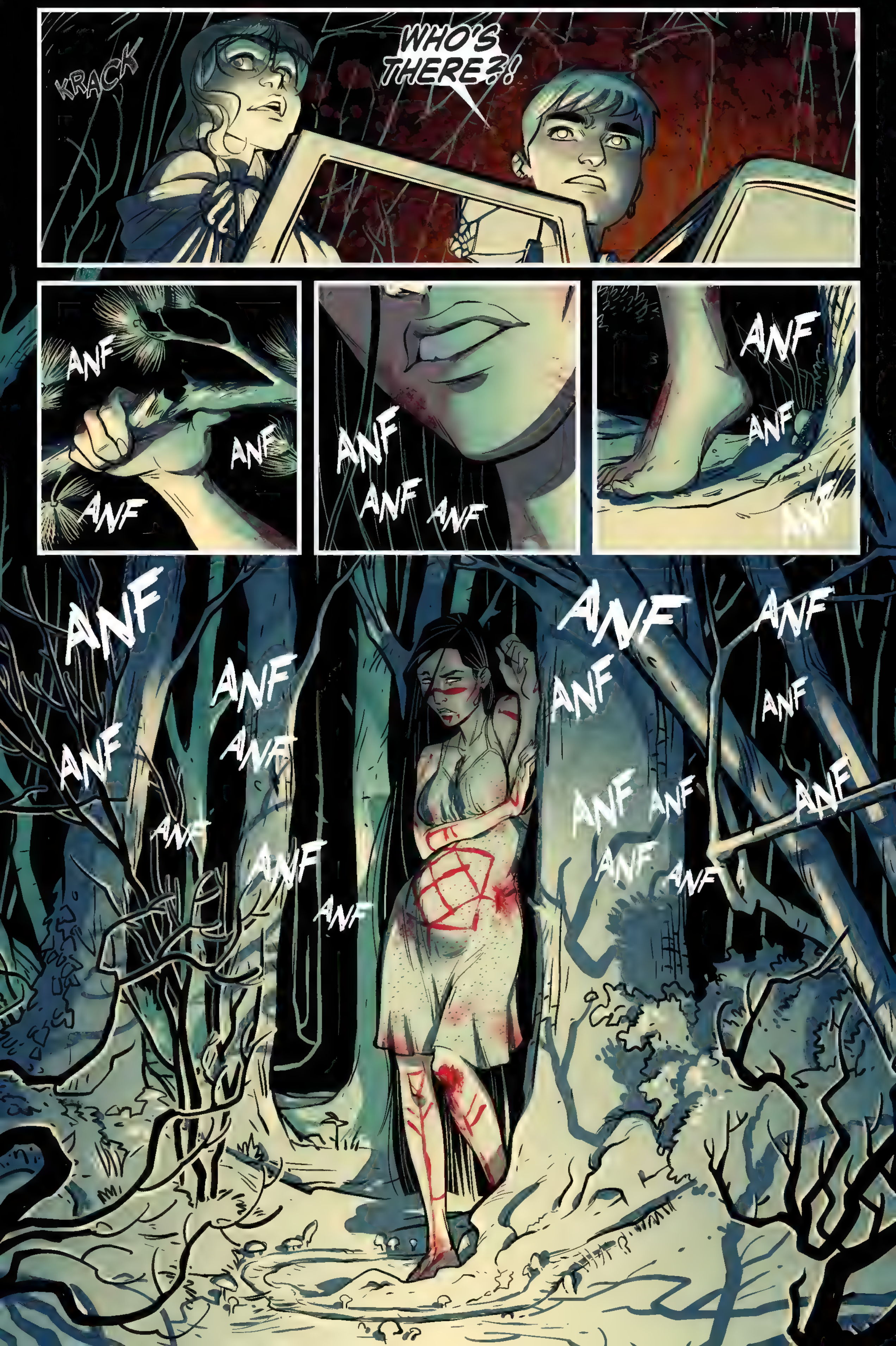

CLAIRE, MY MOTHER'S KITCHEN IS NOT A TEMPLE...
AND WELL... THERE WON'T BE ANY MORE *SATURDAY LUNCHES* IF YOU MOVE TO *MANHATTAN.*
I HAVEN'T DECIDED *YET!*
YES YOU HAVE!
BUT... MAYBE...
...IT'S JUST THAT SINCE MR. MOLINA TALKED TO MY FATHER, I KEEP THINKING ABOUT IT.
THIS *SHOP...* IT'S *VERY OLD,* BASICALLY A *HISTORICAL MONUMENT.*
I CAN STILL SMELL THE *DUSTY LEATHER...*
I MUST BE CRAZY...
...SO *THAT'S* WHY YOU SKINNY-DIP AT *MIDNIGHT.*
BOOKSTORES BARELY EXIST ANYMORE! THEY'RE ALL CLOSING! I'LL ONLY *HAVE* CRAZY MEMORIES SOON ENOUGH.
WELL LISTEN...
WE'VE TALKED ABOUT IT. I'M LOOKING FOR AN *ORTHOPEDICS RESIDENCY...* SO IF I *FIND* ONE THERE YOU CAN *SHOW* ME YOUR MONUMENT BEFORE IT DISAPPEARS.


YOU'RE *CRAZY.*
BUT YOU'RE *NOT* GETTING RID OF ME.
WAIT... *WHAT?!*


OH FUCK. CLAIRE, WAKE UP!
MMMMH?
TLACK
IT'S SOME TYPE OF ACCIDENT!
I--I'LL CALL AN AMBULANCE!
OUR PHONE'S BEEN DEAD SINCE YESTERDAY. LET'S...LET'S CHECK AND SEE IF ANYONE'S HURT.
THERE'S A FIRST AID KIT UNDER THE SEAT.


BUT... THERE'S *NOBODY THERE...*
AND *LOOK* AT THIS... WHATEVER HAPPENED, *JUST* HAPPENED...
HOW COULD *ANYONE* WALK AWAY FROM THIS?
MEERA, LOOK! THERE'S ANOTHER CAR!


OH GOD...
IS IT--ARE THEY...
I DON'T KNOW...
SHE... SHE DIDN'T MAKE IT.


KRACK
WHO'S THERE?!
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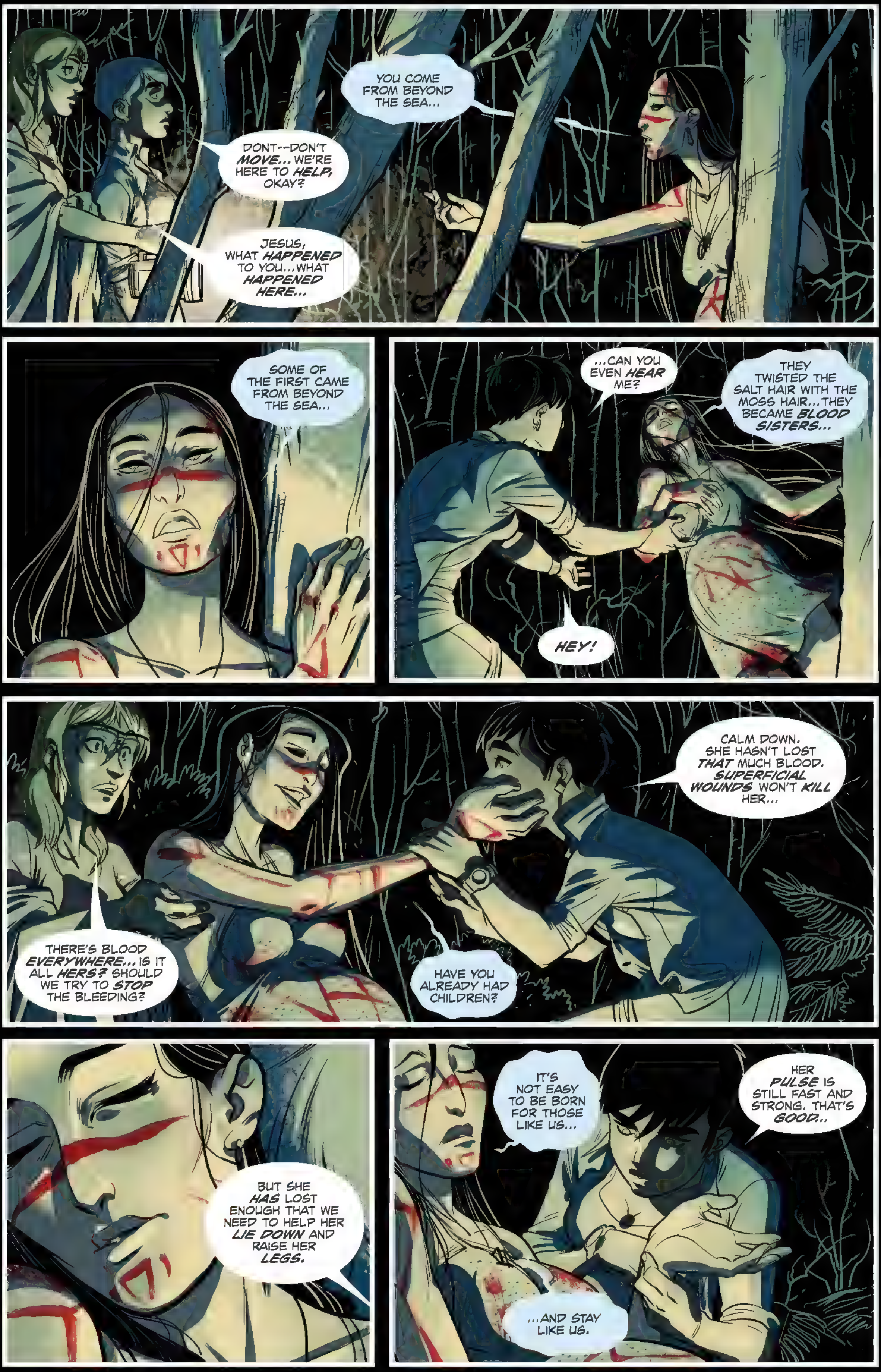
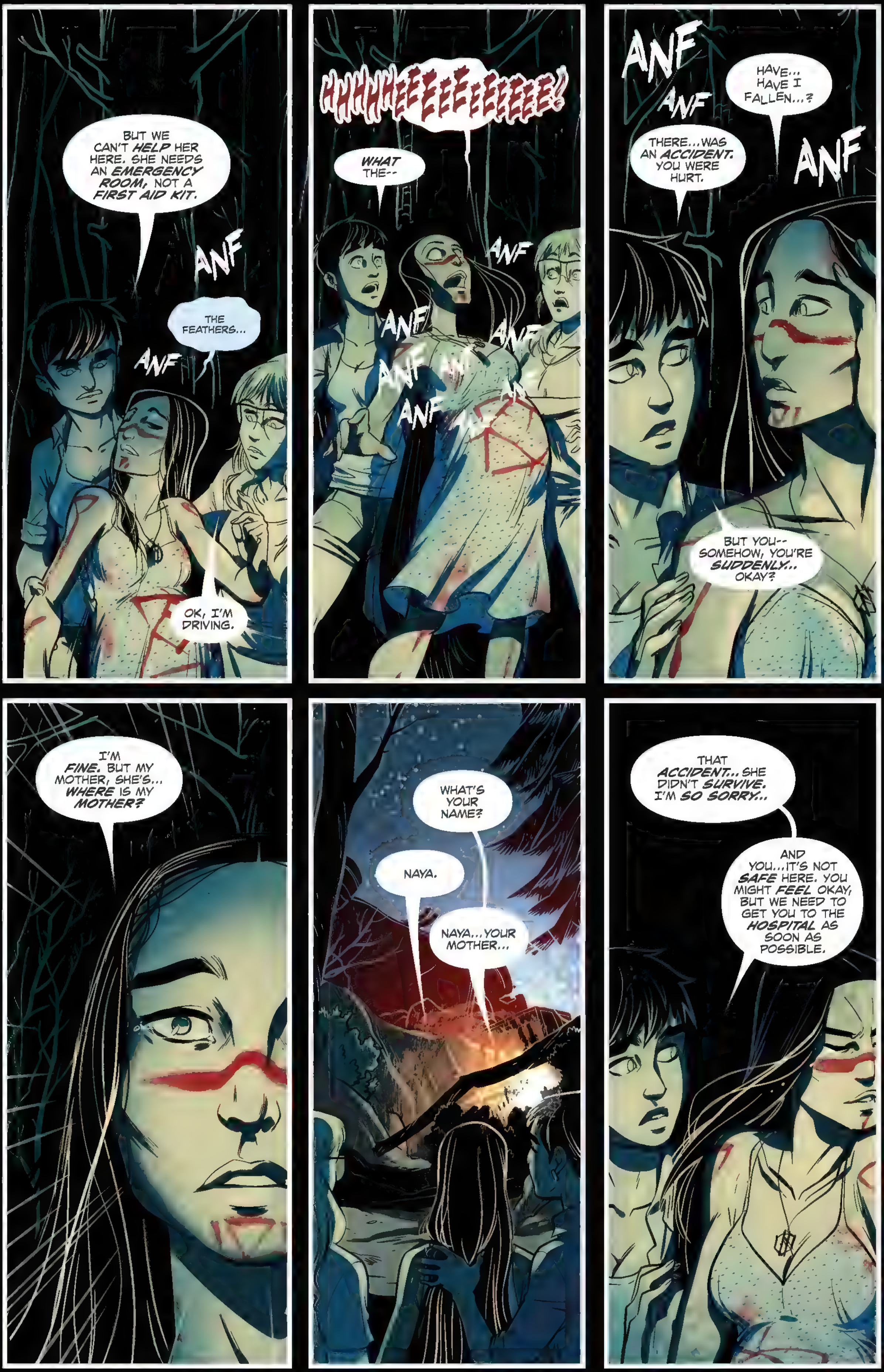
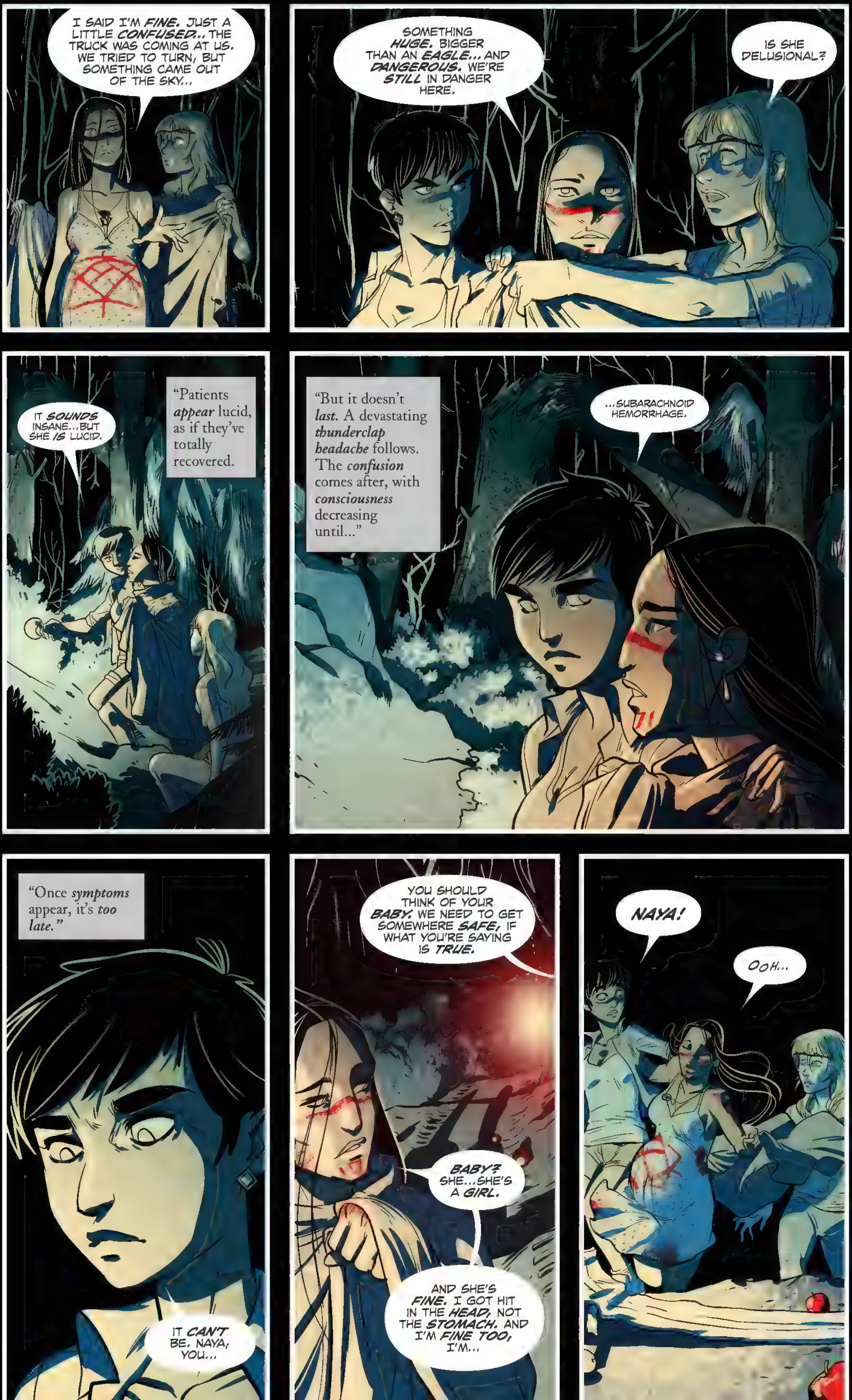
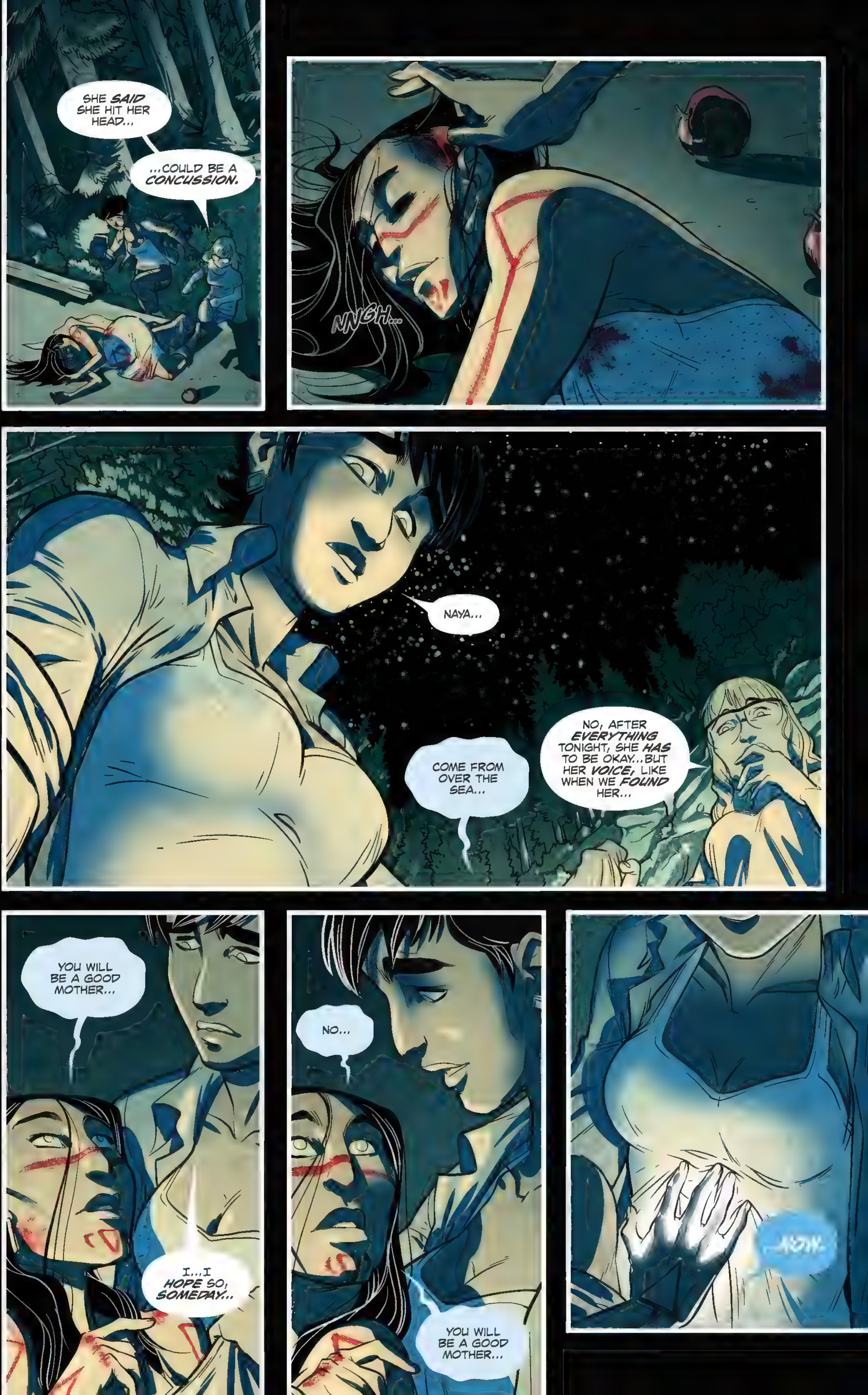
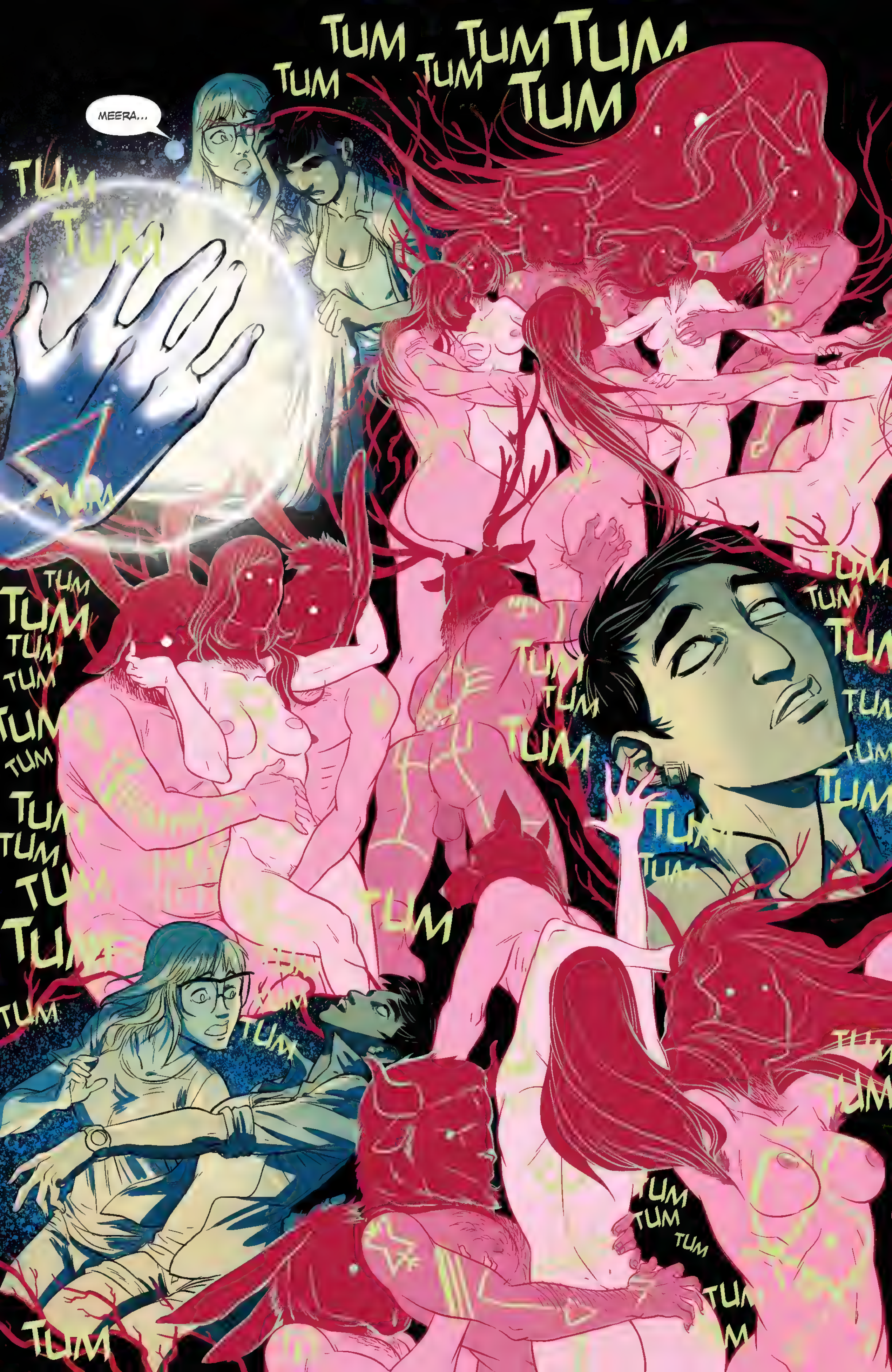

DONT--DON'T *MOVE*... WE'RE HERE TO *HELP*, OKAY?
JESUS, WHAT *HAPPENED* TO YOU... WHAT *HAPPENED HERE*...
YOU COME FROM BEYOND THE SEA...
SOME OF THE FIRST CAME FROM BEYOND THE SEA...
...CAN YOU EVEN *HEAR* ME?
THEY TWISTED THE SALT HAIR WITH THE MOSS HAIR... THEY BECAME *BLOOD SISTERS*...
HEY!
THERE'S BLOOD *EVERYWHERE*... IS IT ALL *HERS?* SHOULD WE TRY TO *STOP* THE BLEEDING?
CALM DOWN. SHE HASN'T LOST *THAT* MUCH BLOOD. *SUPERFICIAL WOUNDS* WON'T *KILL* HER...
HAVE YOU ALREADY HAD CHILDREN?
BUT SHE *HAS* LOST ENOUGH THAT WE NEED TO HELP HER *LIE DOWN* AND RAISE HER *LEGS*.
IT'S NOT EASY TO BE BORN FOR THOSE LIKE US...
HER *PULSE* IS STILL FAST AND STRONG. THAT'S *GOOD*...
...AND STAY LIKE US.


BUT WE CAN'T HELP HER HERE. SHE NEEDS AN EMERGENCY ROOM, NOT A FIRST AID KIT.
ANF
THE FEATHERS...
ANF
OK, I'M DRIVING.
HHHHHEEEEEEEEEEEE!
WHAT THE--
ANF
ANF
ANF
ANF
ANF
ANF
ANF
ANF
HAVE... HAVE I FALLEN...?
THERE...WAS AN ACCIDENT. YOU WERE HURT.
ANF
BUT YOU-- SOMEHOW, YOU'RE SUDDENLY... OKAY?
I'M FINE. BUT MY MOTHER, SHE'S... WHERE IS MY MOTHER?
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
NAYA.
NAYA... YOUR MOTHER...
THAT ACCIDENT... SHE DIDN'T SURVIVE. I'M SO SORRY...
AND YOU... IT'S NOT SAFE HERE. YOU MIGHT FEEL OKAY, BUT WE NEED TO GET YOU TO THE HOSPITAL AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.


I SAID I'M *FINE.* JUST A LITTLE *CONFUSED..* THE TRUCK WAS COMING AT US. WE TRIED TO TURN, BUT SOMETHING CAME OUT OF THE SKY...
SOMETHING *HUGE.* BIGGER THAN AN *EAGLE...* AND *DANGEROUS.* WE'RE *STILL* IN DANGER HERE.
IS SHE DELUSIONAL?
IT *SOUNDS* INSANE...BUT SHE *IS* LUCID.
"Patients *appear* lucid, as if they've totally recovered.
"But it doesn't *last.* A devastating ***thunderclap headache*** follows. The *confusion* comes after, with ***consciousness*** decreasing until..."
...SUBARACHNOID HEMORRHAGE.
"Once *symptoms* appear, it's *too late.*"
IT *CAN'T* BE. NAYA, YOU...
YOU SHOULD THINK OF YOUR *BABY.* WE NEED TO GET SOMEWHERE *SAFE,* IF WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS *TRUE.*
BABY? SHE...SHE'S A *GIRL.*
AND SHE'S *FINE.* I GOT HIT IN THE *HEAD,* NOT THE *STOMACH.* AND I'M *FINE TOO,* I'M...
NAYA!
OOH...


SHE *SAID* SHE HIT HER HEAD...
...COULD BE A *CONCUSSION.*
NNGH...
NAYA...
COME FROM OVER THE SEA...
NO, AFTER *EVERYTHING* TONIGHT, SHE *HAS* TO BE OKAY...BUT HER *VOICE,* LIKE WHEN WE *FOUND* HER...
YOU WILL BE A GOOD MOTHER...
I...I *HOPE* SO, *SOMEDAY...*
NO...
YOU WILL BE A GOOD MOTHER...
...NOW...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MEERA...
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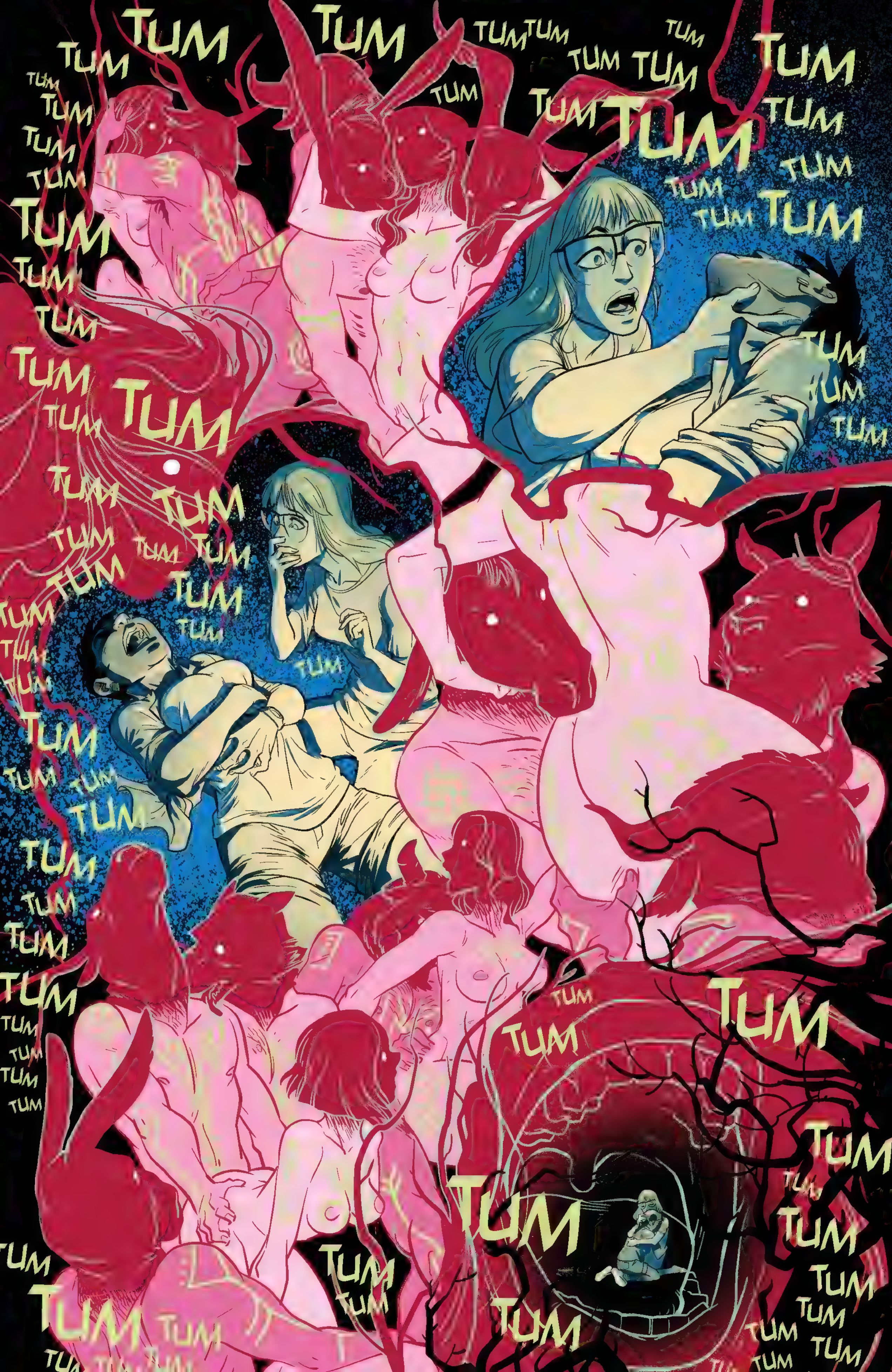
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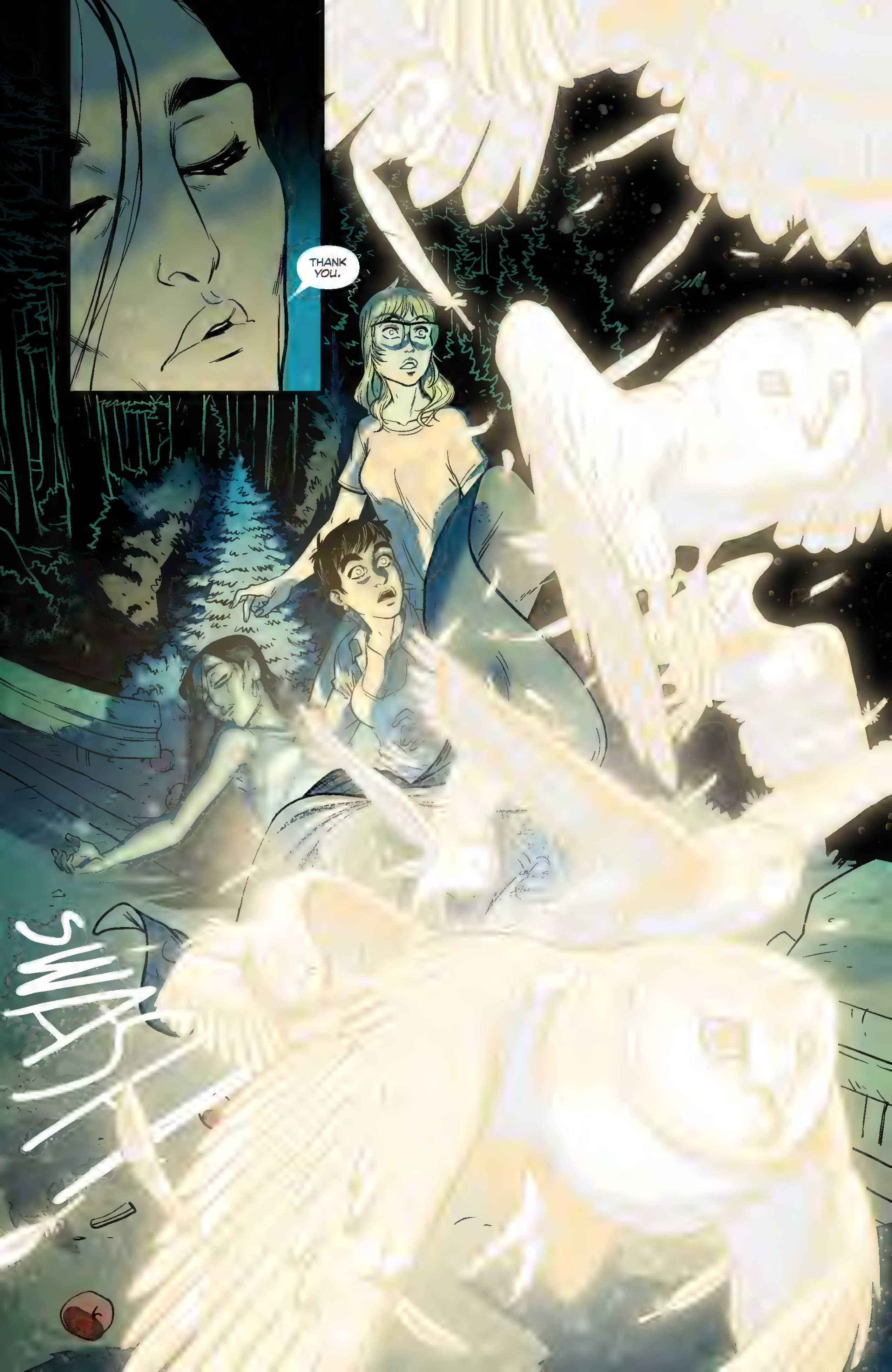
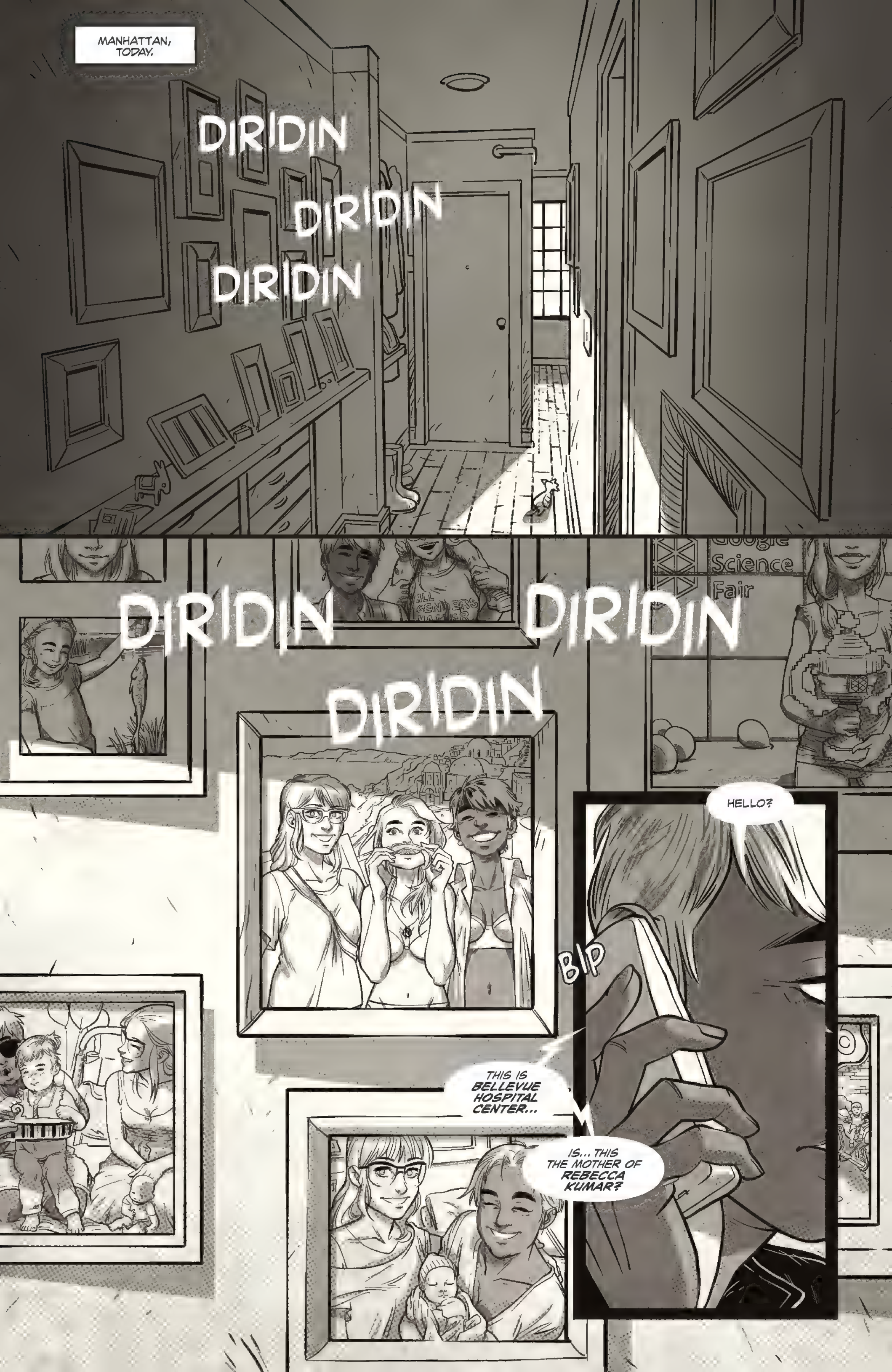
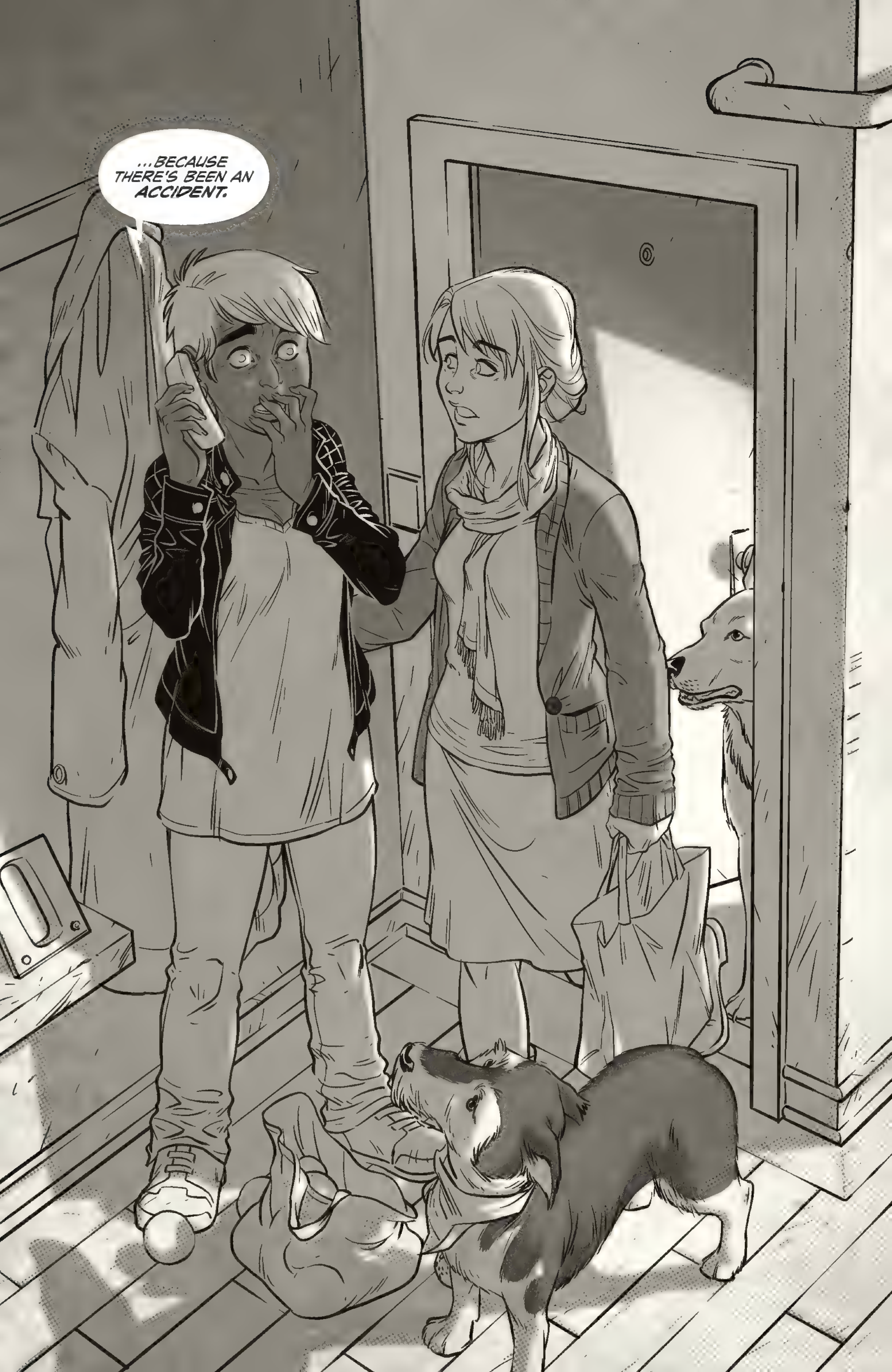
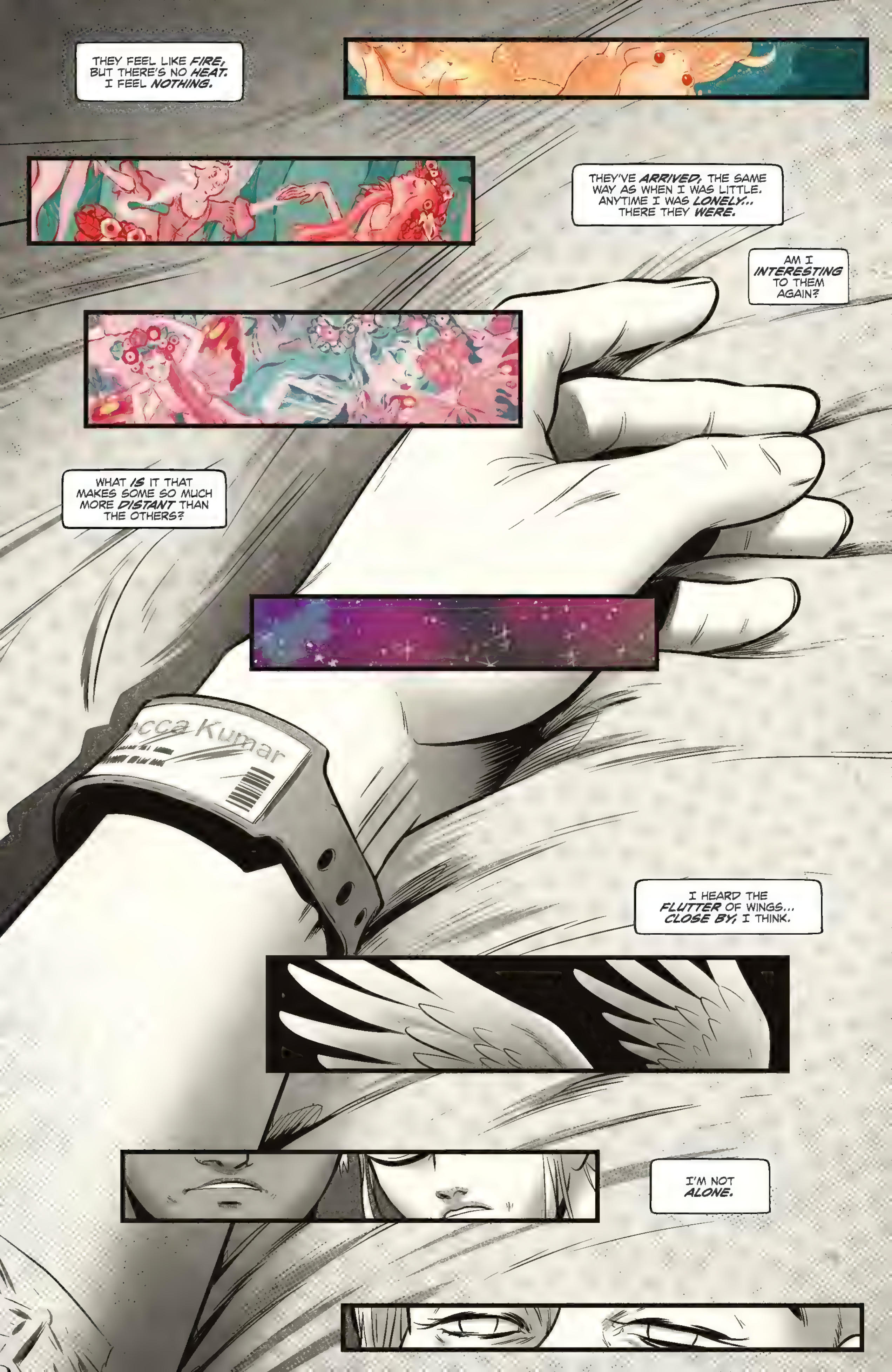
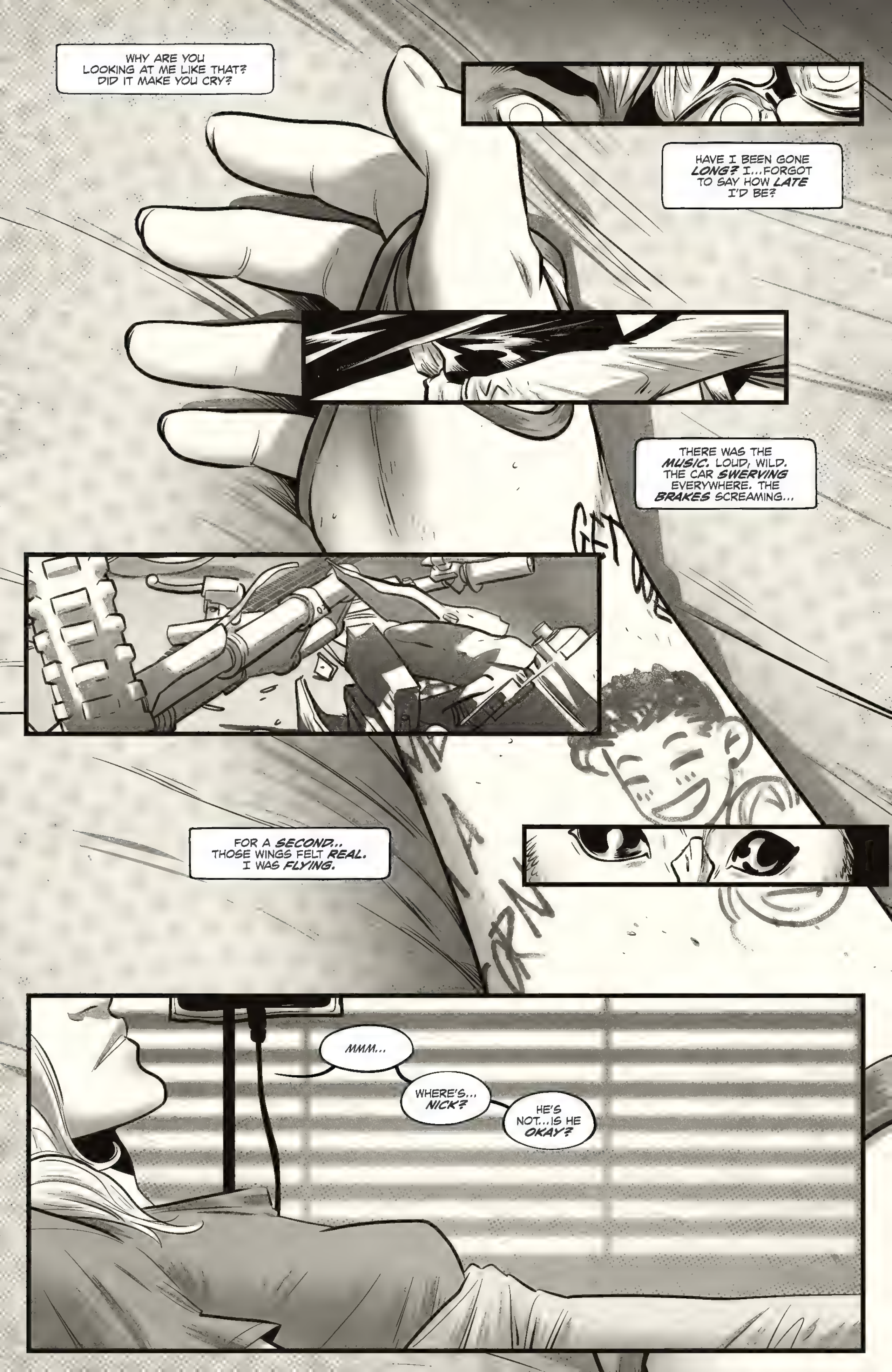
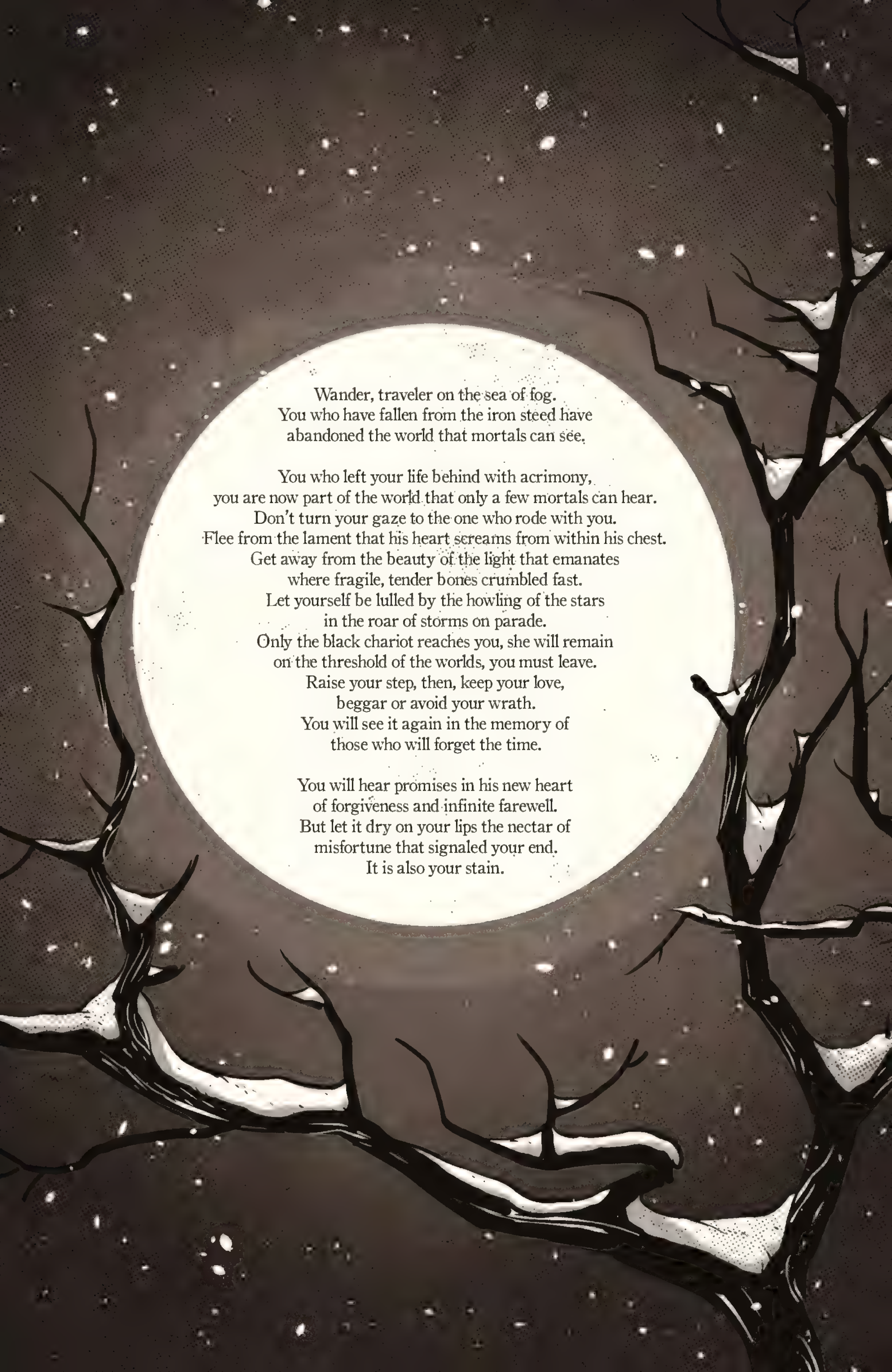

THANK YOU.
SWAT


MANHATTAN, TODAY.
DIRIDIN
DIRIDIN
DIRIDIN
ALL GENDERS MATTER
Google Science Fair
DIRIDIN
DIRIDIN
DIRIDIN
HELLO?
BIP
THIS IS BELLEVUE HOSPITAL CENTER...
IS... THIS THE MOTHER OF REBECCA KUMAR?


...BECAUSE THERE'S BEEN AN ACCIDENT.


THEY FEEL LIKE *FIRE,* BUT THERE'S NO *HEAT.* I FEEL *NOTHING.*
THEY'VE *ARRIVED,* THE SAME WAY AS WHEN I WAS LITTLE. ANYTIME I WAS *LONELY...* THERE THEY *WERE.*
AM I *INTERESTING* TO THEM AGAIN?
WHAT *IS* IT THAT MAKES SOME SO MUCH MORE *DISTANT* THAN THE OTHERS?
cca Kumar
I HEARD THE *FLUTTER* OF WINGS... *CLOSE BY,* I THINK.
I'M NOT *ALONE.*

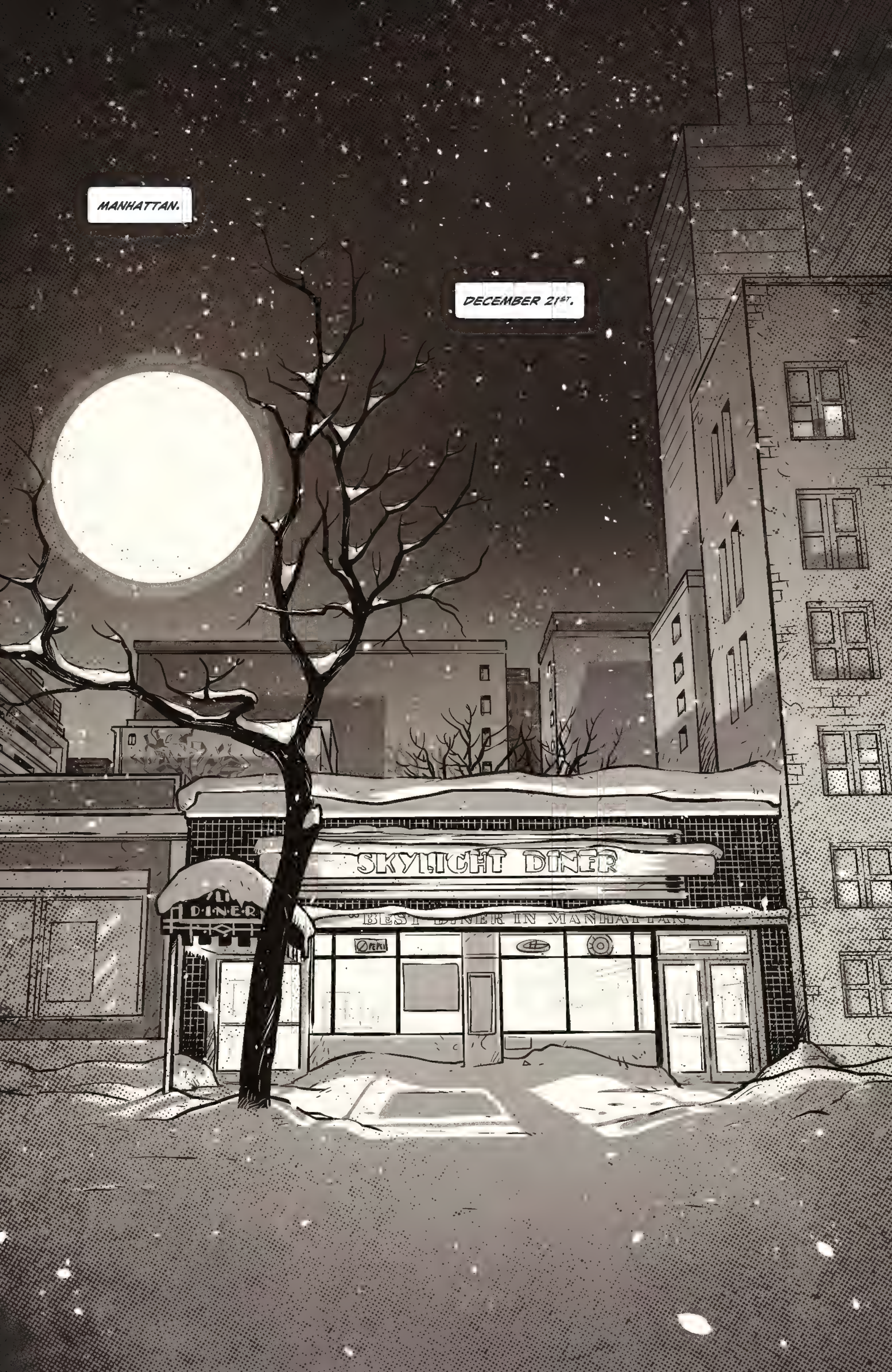

WHY ARE YOU LOOKING AT ME LIKE THAT? DID IT MAKE YOU CRY?
HAVE I BEEN GONE *LONG?* I...FORGOT TO SAY HOW *LATE* I'D BE?
THERE WAS THE *MUSIC.* LOUD, WILD. THE CAR *SWERVING* EVERYWHERE. THE *BRAKES* SCREAMING...
GET ME
FOR A *SECOND...* THOSE WINGS FELT *REAL.* I WAS *FLYING.*
MMM...
WHERE'S... *NICK?*
HE'S NOT...IS HE *OKAY?*

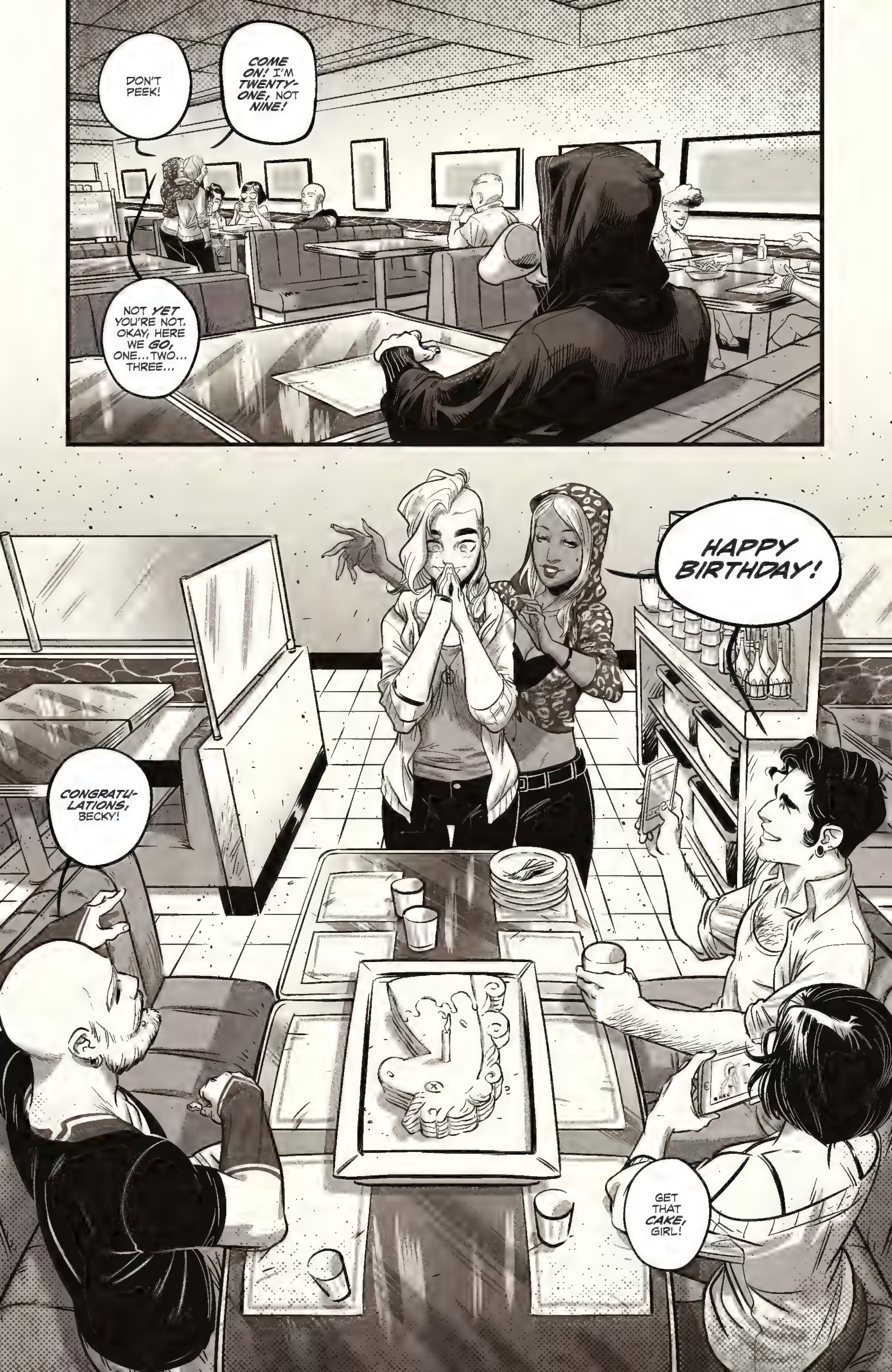


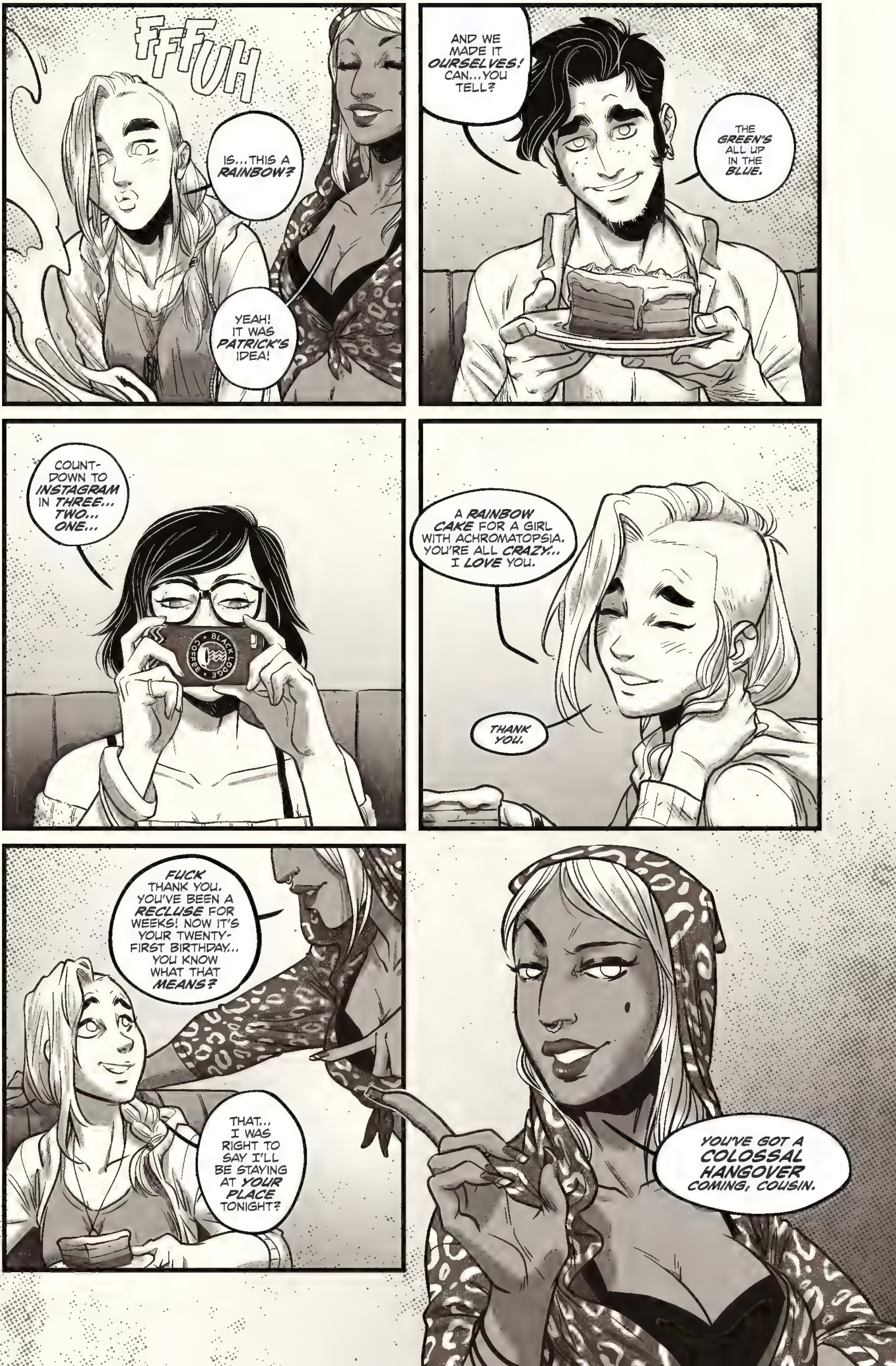
Wander, traveler on the sea of fog.
You who have fallen from the iron steed have
abandoned the world that mortals can see.

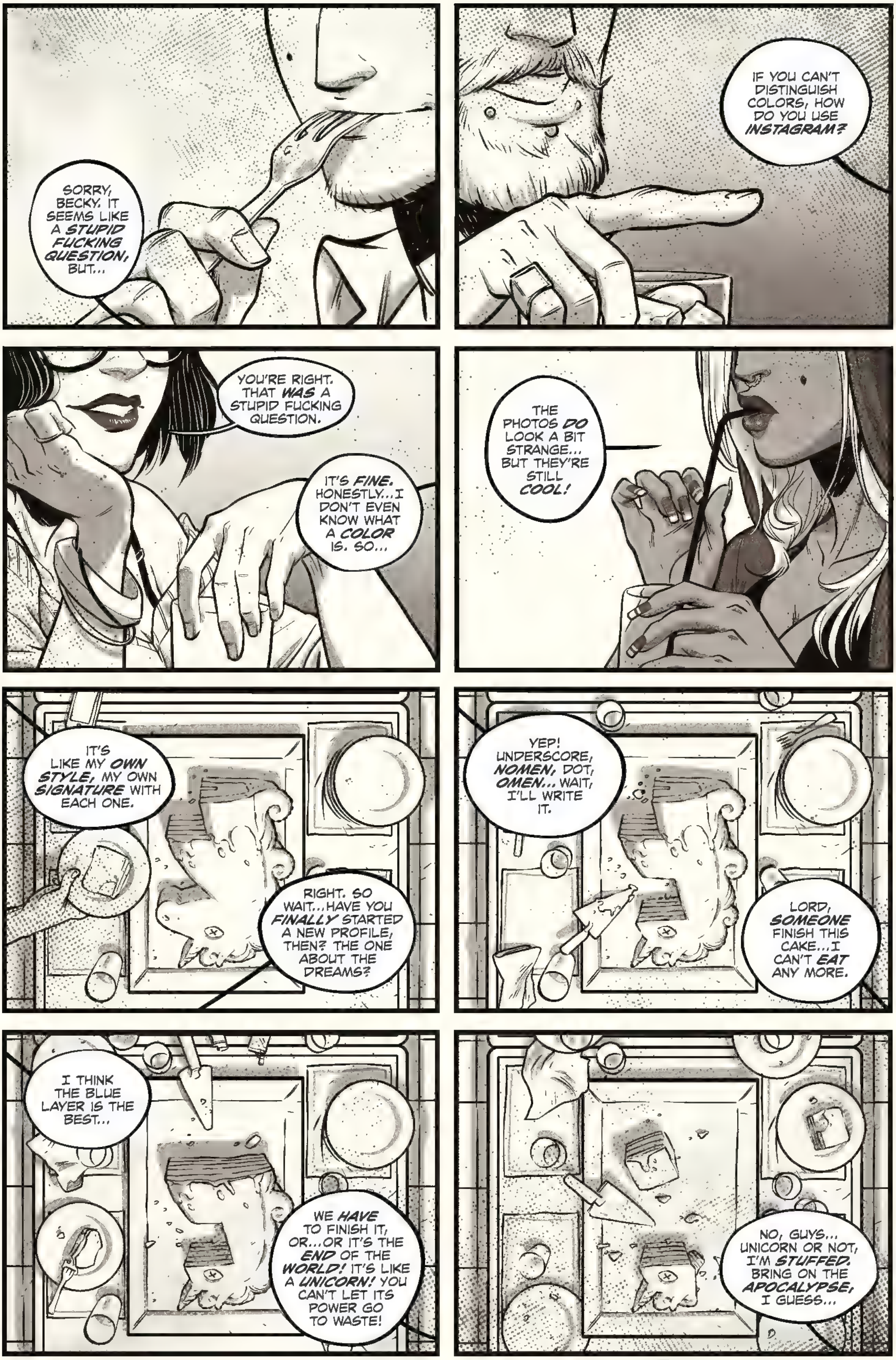
You who left your life behind with acrimony,
you are now part of the world that only a few mortals can hear.
Don't turn your gaze to the one who rode with you.
Flee from the lament that his heart screams from within his chest.
Get away from the beauty of the light that emanates
where fragile, tender bones crumbled fast.
Let yourself be lulled by the howling of the stars
in the roar of storms on parade.
Only the black chariot reaches you, she will remain
on the threshold of the worlds, you must leave.
Raise your step, then, keep your love,
beggar or avoid your wrath.
You will see it again in the memory of
those who will forget the time.

You will hear promises in his new heart
of forgiveness and infinite farewell.
But let it dry on your lips the nectar of
misfortune that signaled your end.
It is also your stain.

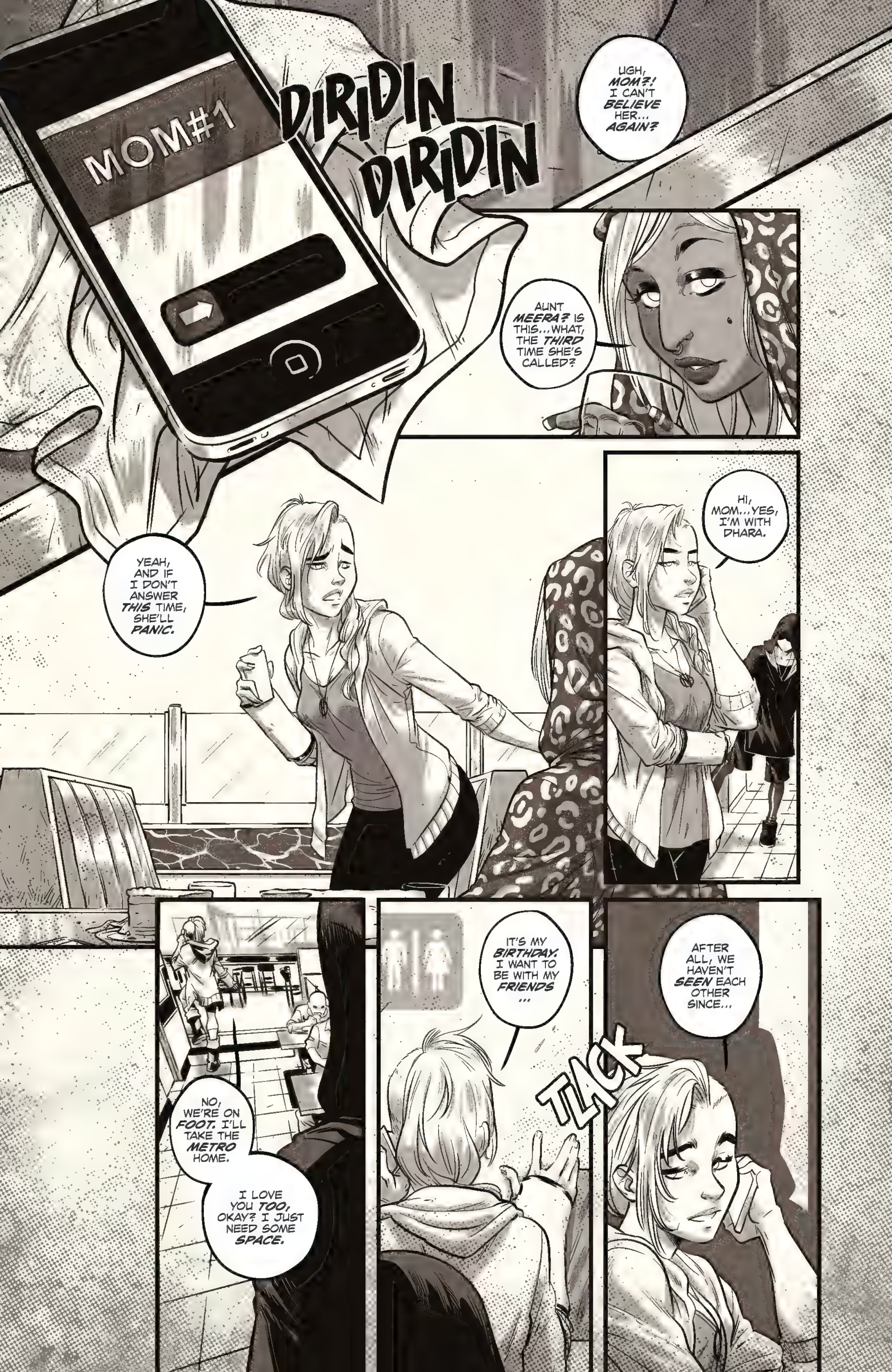

MANHATTAN.
DECEMBER 21ST.
SKYLIGHT DINER
BEST DINER IN MANHATTAN
DINER
OPEN

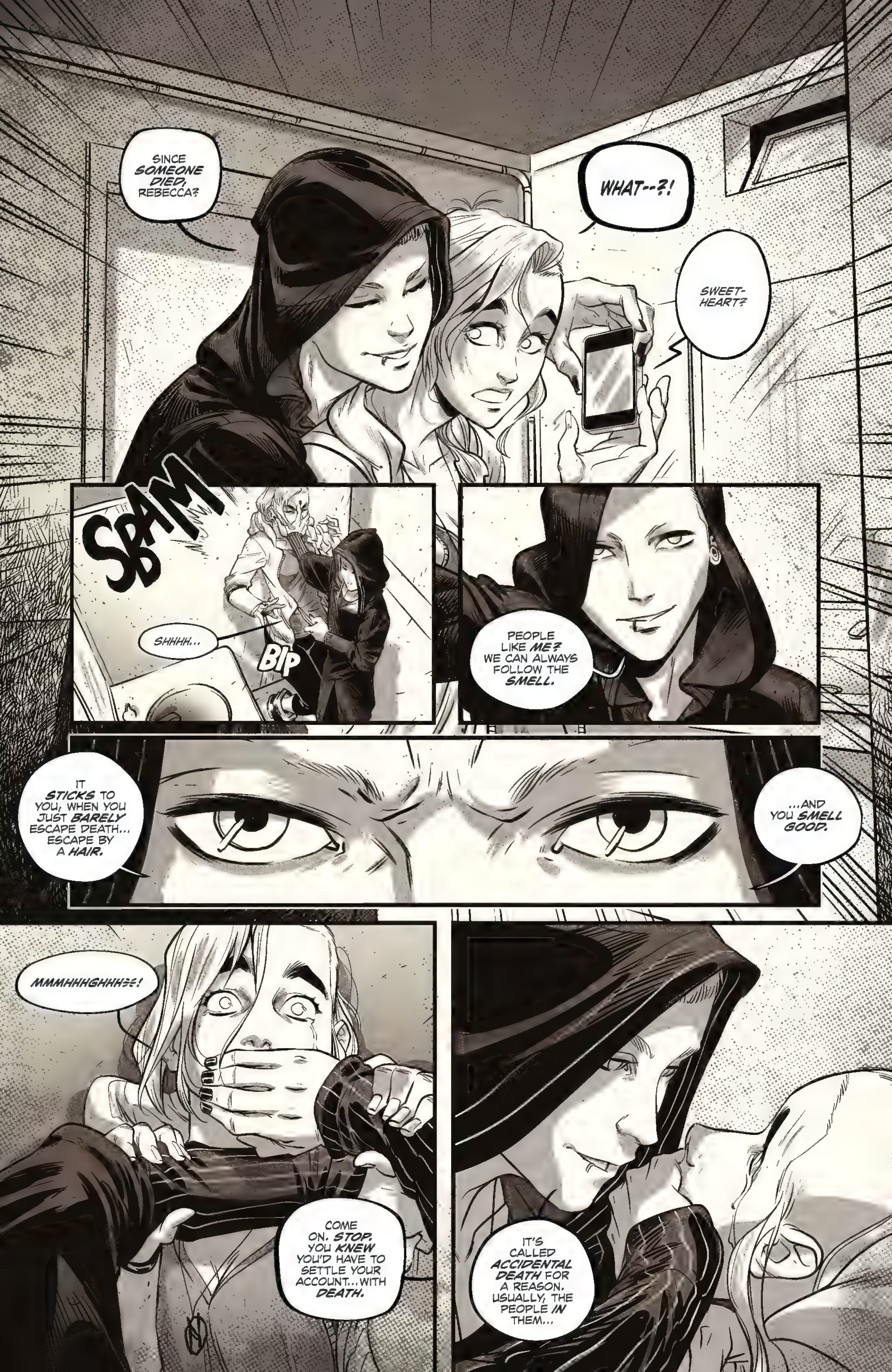

DON'T PEEK!
COME ON! I'M TWENTY-ONE, NOT NINE!
NOT YET YOU'RE NOT. OKAY, HERE WE GO, ONE...TWO... THREE...
HAPPY BIRTHDAY!
CONGRATULATIONS, BECKY!
GET THAT CAKE, GIRL!

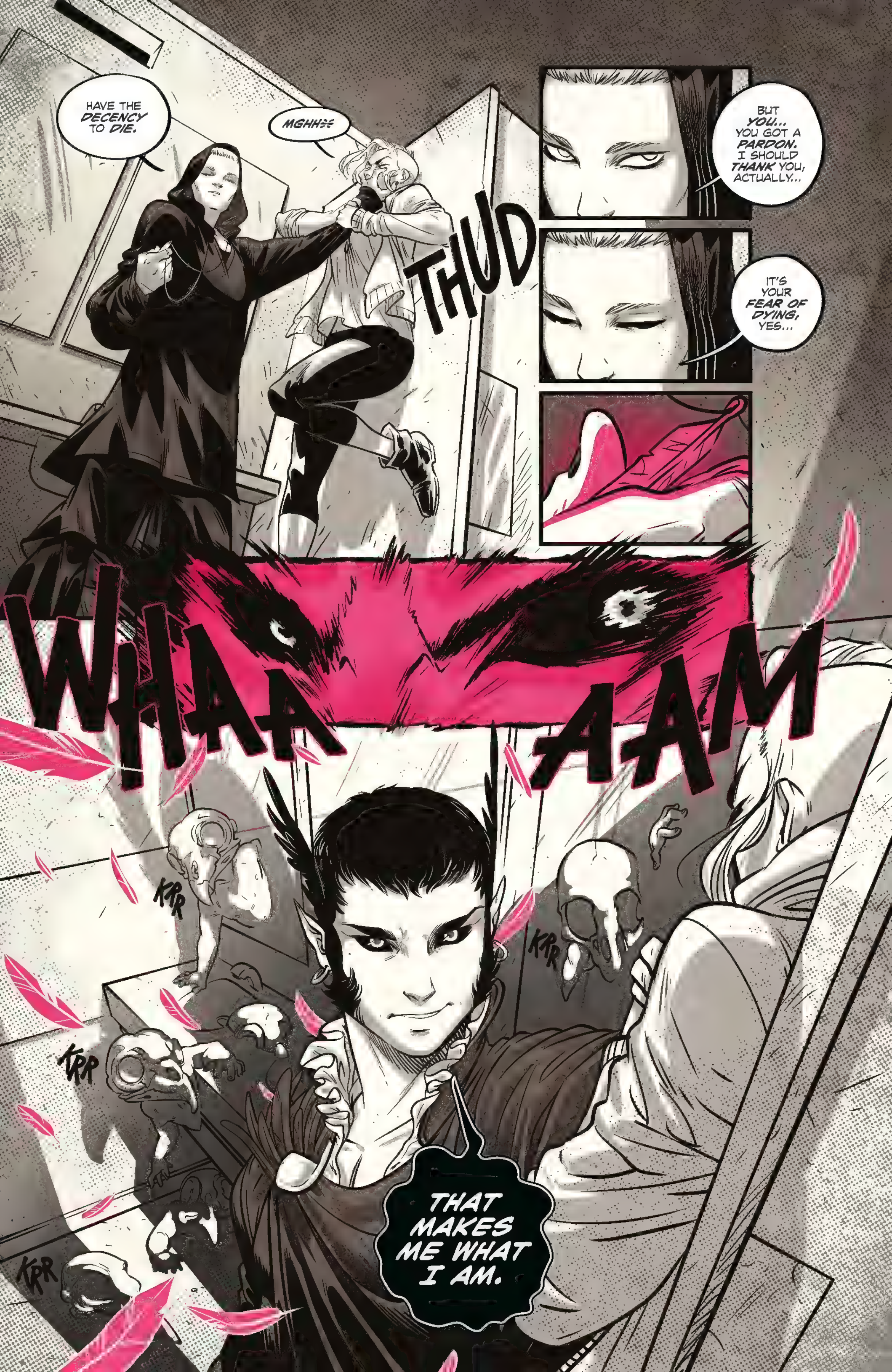

FFFUH
IS... THIS A *RAINBOW?*
YEAH! IT WAS *PATRICK'S* IDEA!
AND WE MADE IT *OURSELVES!* CAN... YOU TELL?
THE *GREEN'S* ALL UP IN THE *BLUE.*
COUNT-DOWN TO *INSTAGRAM* IN *THREE... TWO... ONE...*
BLACK LODGE COFFEE
A *RAINBOW CAKE* FOR A GIRL WITH ACHROMATOPSIA. YOU'RE ALL *CRAZY*... I *LOVE* YOU.
THANK YOU.
FUCK THANK YOU. YOU'VE BEEN A *RECLUSE* FOR WEEKS! NOW IT'S YOUR TWENTY-FIRST BIRTHDAY... YOU KNOW WHAT THAT *MEANS?*
THAT... I WAS RIGHT TO SAY I'LL BE STAYING AT *YOUR PLACE* TONIGHT?
YOU'VE GOT A COLOSSAL HANGOVER *COMING, COUSIN.*

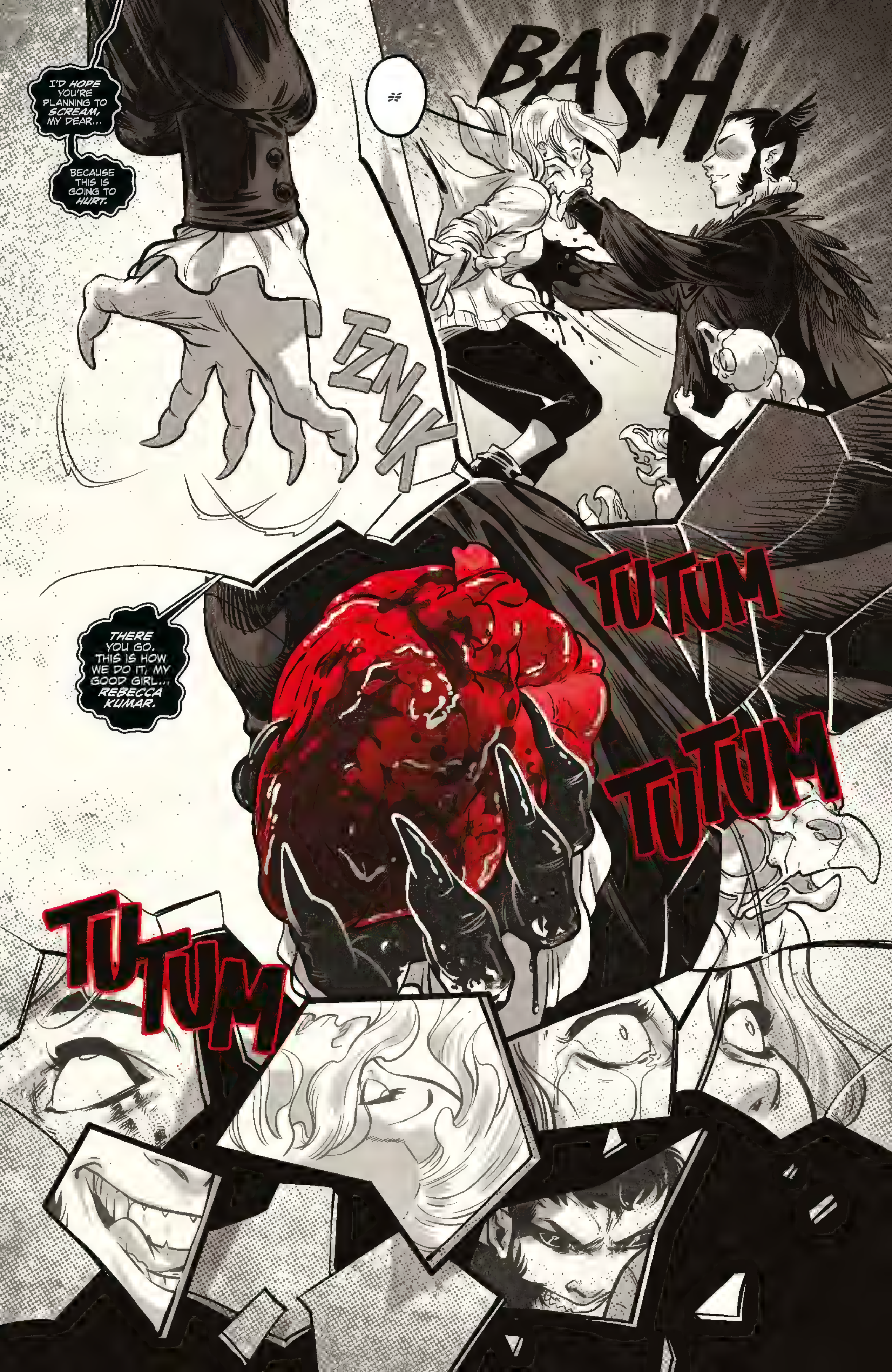

SORRY, BECKY. IT SEEMS LIKE A *STUPID FUCKING QUESTION,* BUT...
IF YOU CAN'T DISTINGUISH COLORS, HOW DO YOU USE *INSTAGRAM?*
YOU'RE RIGHT. THAT *WAS* A STUPID FUCKING QUESTION.
IT'S *FINE.* HONESTLY...I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT A *COLOR* IS. SO...
THE PHOTOS *DO* LOOK A BIT STRANGE... BUT THEY'RE STILL *COOL!*
IT'S LIKE MY *OWN STYLE,* MY OWN *SIGNATURE* WITH EACH ONE.
RIGHT. SO WAIT...HAVE YOU *FINALLY* STARTED A NEW PROFILE, THEN? THE ONE ABOUT THE DREAMS?
YEP! UNDERSCORE, *NOMEN,* DOT, *OMEN...* WAIT, I'LL WRITE IT.
LORD, *SOMEONE* FINISH THIS CAKE...I CAN'T *EAT* ANY MORE.
I THINK THE BLUE LAYER IS THE BEST...
WE *HAVE* TO FINISH IT, OR...OR IT'S THE *END* OF THE *WORLD!* IT'S LIKE A *UNICORN!* YOU CAN'T LET ITS POWER GO TO WASTE!
NO, GUYS... UNICORN OR NOT, I'M *STUFFED.* BRING ON THE *APOCALYPSE,* I GUESS...

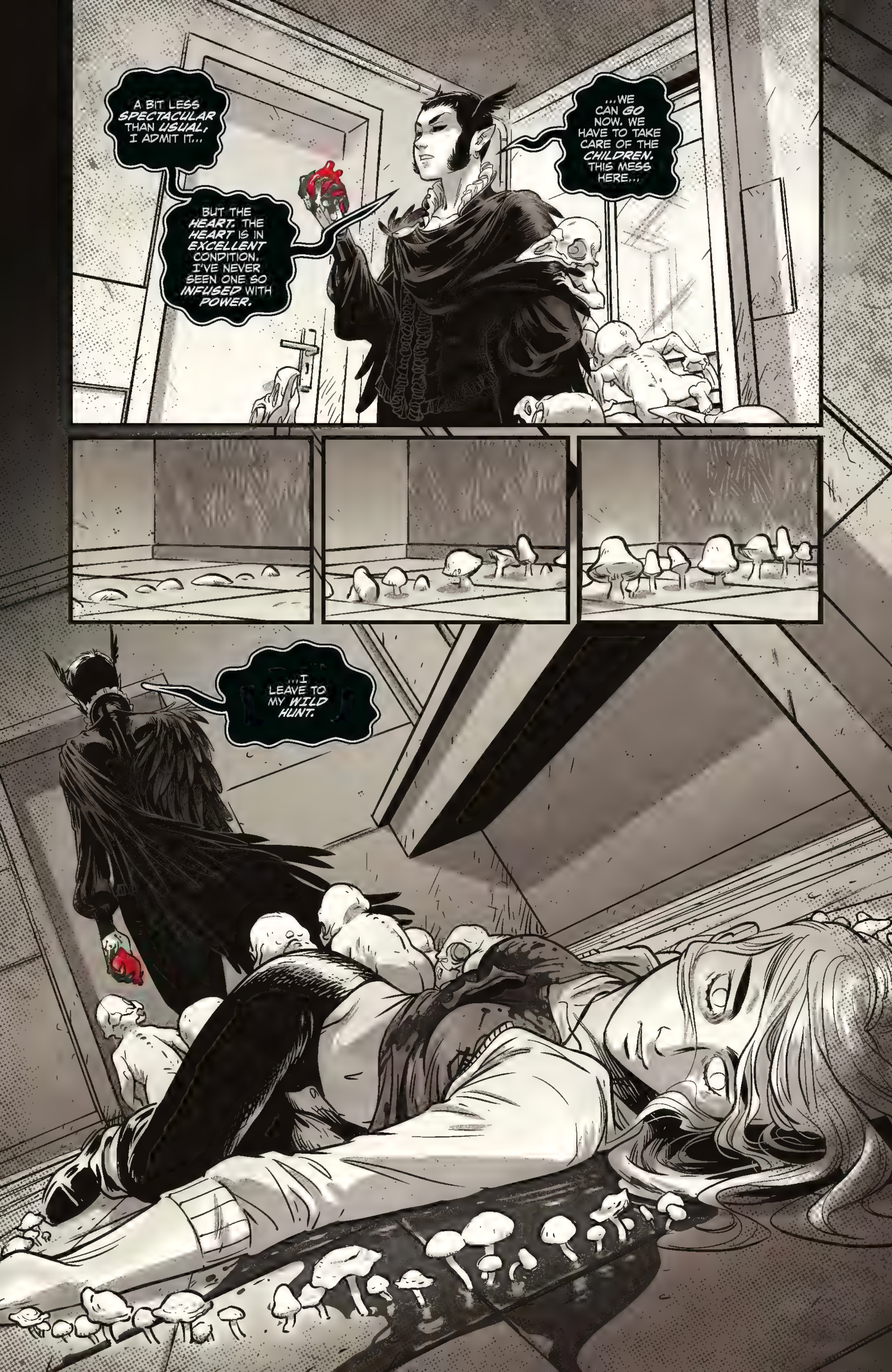
nomen.omen


MOM#1
DIRIDIN DIRIDIN
UGH, MOM?! I CAN'T BELIEVE HER... AGAIN?
AUNT MEERA? IS THIS...WHAT, THE THIRD TIME SHE'S CALLED?
YEAH, AND IF I DON'T ANSWER THIS TIME, SHE'LL PANIC.
HI, MOM...YES, I'M WITH DHARA.
NO, WE'RE ON FOOT. I'LL TAKE THE METRO HOME.
I LOVE YOU TOO, OKAY? I JUST NEED SOME SPACE.
IT'S MY BIRTHDAY. I WANT TO BE WITH MY FRIENDS...
TACK
AFTER ALL, WE HAVEN'T SEEN EACH OTHER SINCE...

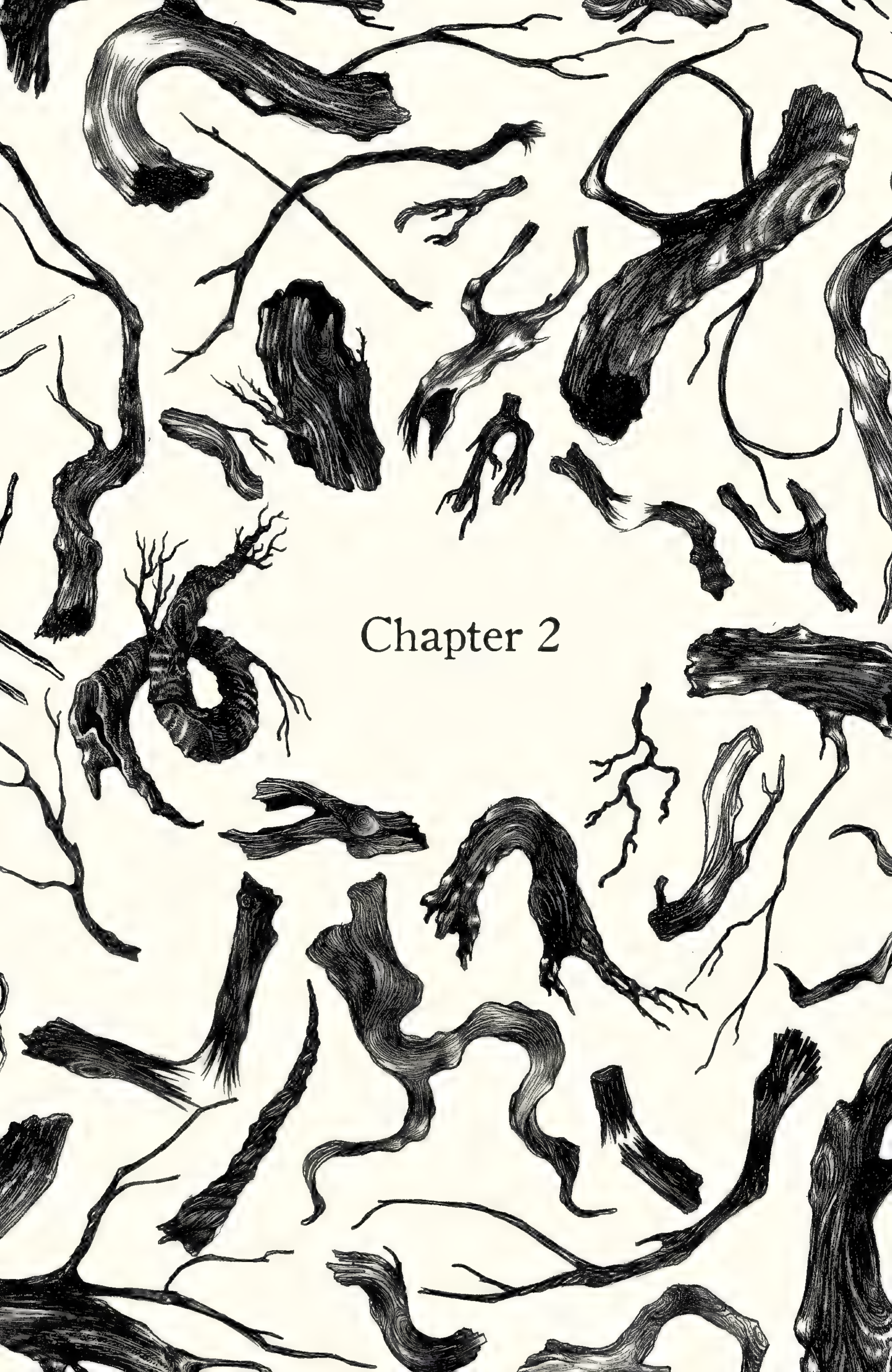

SINCE SOMEONE DIED, REBECCA?
WHAT--?!
SWEET-HEART?
SBAM
SHHHH...
BIP
PEOPLE LIKE ME? WE CAN ALWAYS FOLLOW THE SMELL.
IT STICKS TO YOU, WHEN YOU JUST BARELY ESCAPE DEATH... ESCAPE BY A HAIR.
...AND YOU SMELL GOOD.
MMMHHHGHHH?!
COME ON. STOP. YOU KNEW YOU'D HAVE TO SETTLE YOUR ACCOUNT...WITH DEATH.
IT'S CALLED ACCIDENTAL DEATH FOR A REASON. USUALLY, THE PEOPLE IN THEM...

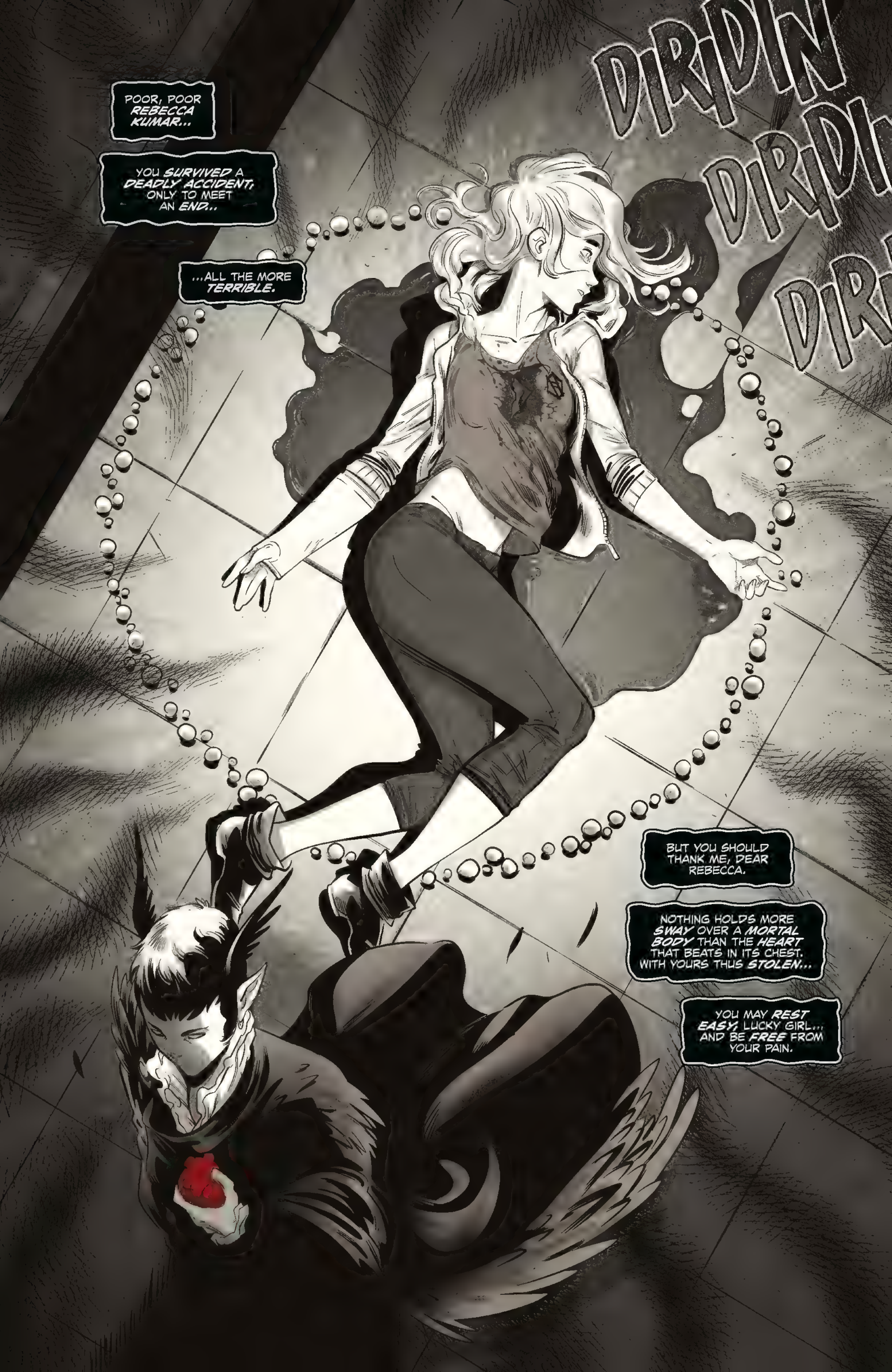

HAVE THE *DECENCY* TO *DIE*.
MGHH!!
THUD
BUT *YOU*... YOU GOT A *PARDON*. I SHOULD *THANK* YOU, ACTUALLY...
IT'S YOUR *FEAR OF DYING*, YES...
WHAAAAM
KRR
KRR
KRR
KRR
THAT MAKES ME WHAT I AM.

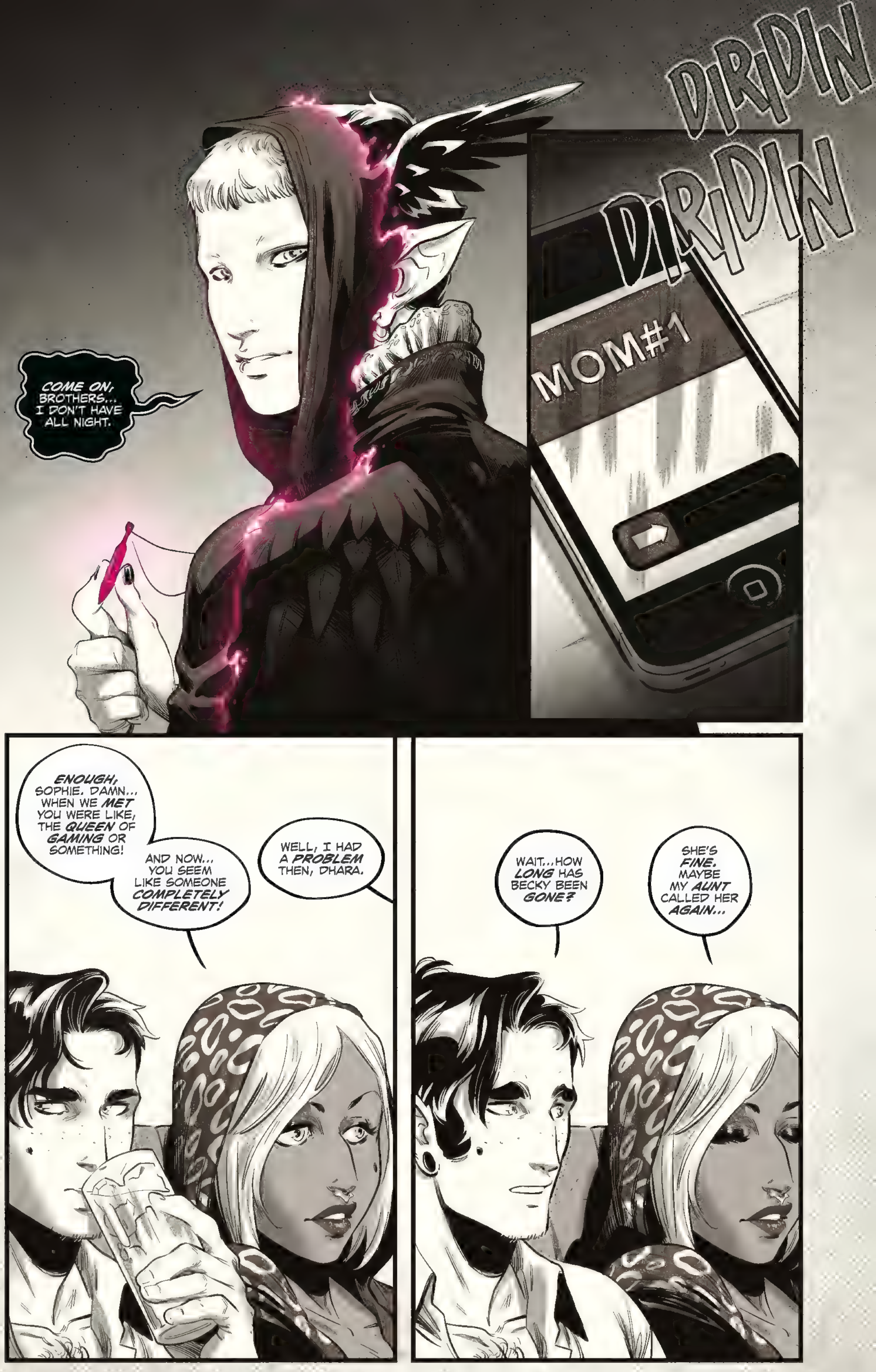

I'D *HOPE* YOU'RE PLANNING TO *SCREAM*, MY DEAR...
BECAUSE THIS IS GOING TO *HURT*.
*
BASH
TZNIK
TUTUM
THERE YOU GO. THIS IS HOW WE DO IT, MY GOOD GIRL... *REBECCA KUMAR*.
TUTUM
TUTUM

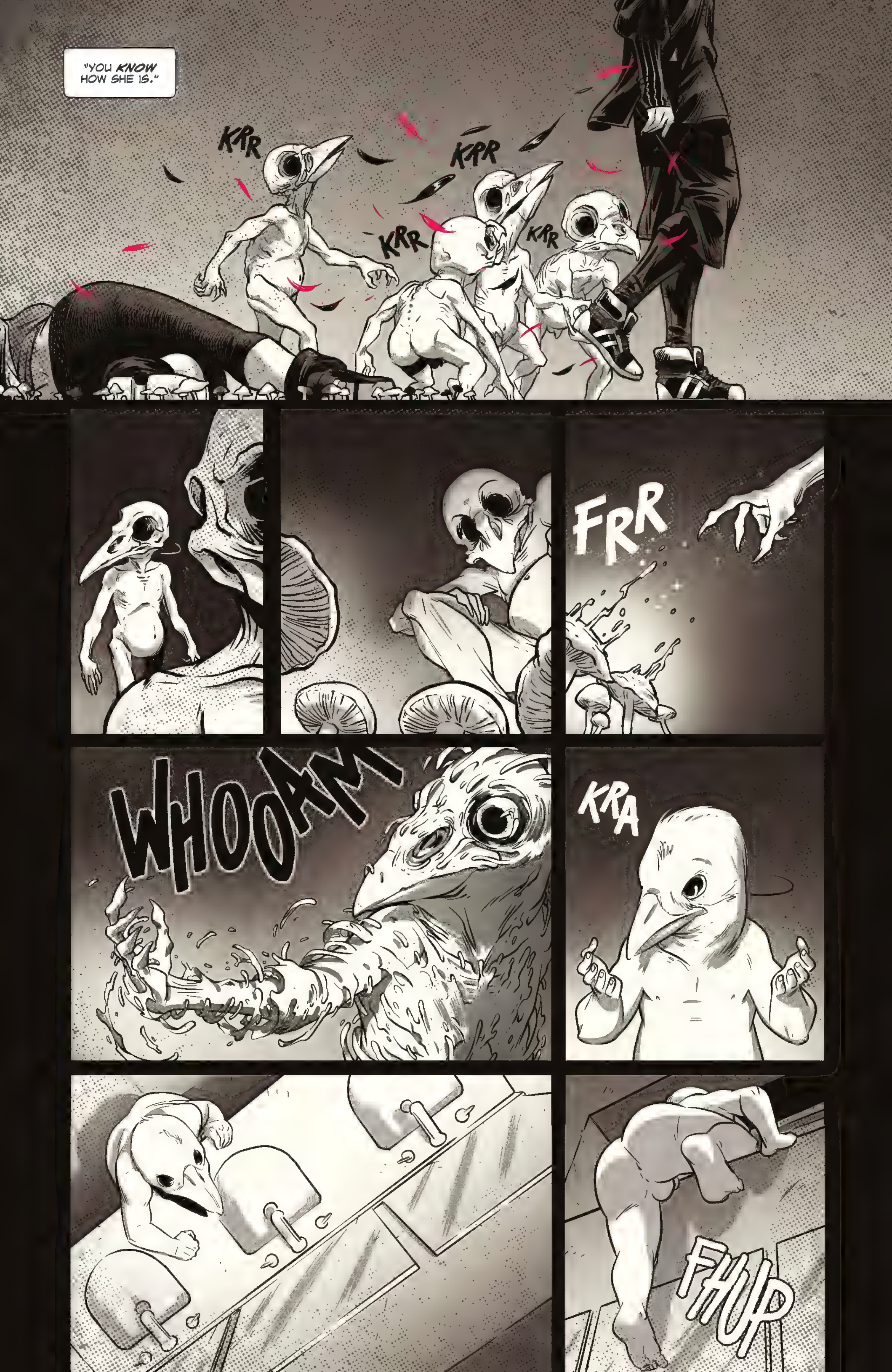

A BIT LESS *SPECTACULAR* THAN *USUAL*, I ADMIT IT...
BUT THE *HEART*. THE *HEART* IS IN *EXCELLENT* CONDITION. I'VE NEVER SEEN ONE SO *INFUSED* WITH *POWER*.
...WE CAN *GO* NOW. WE HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF THE *CHILDREN*. THIS MESS HERE...
...I LEAVE TO MY *WILD HUNT*.

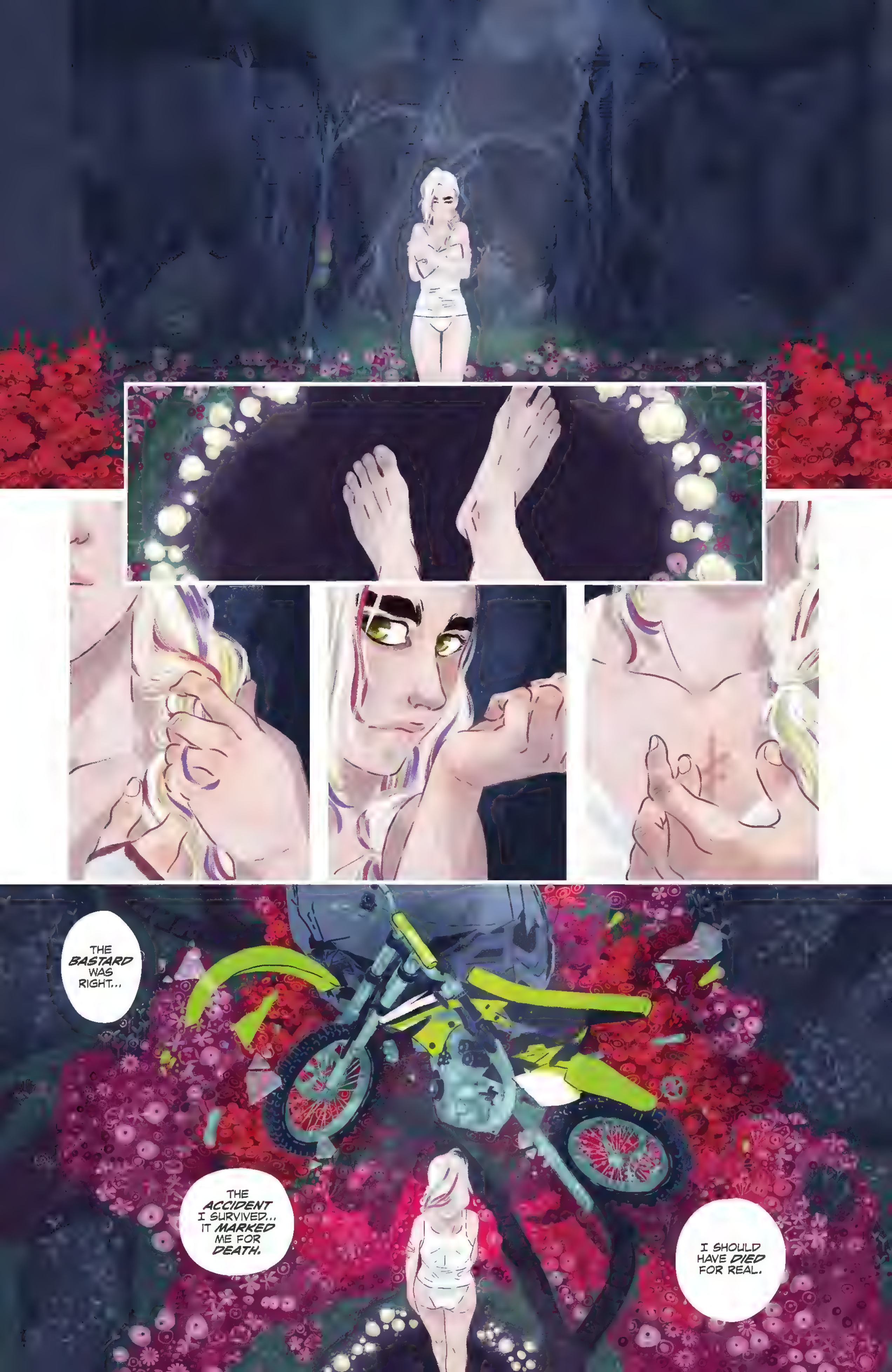
Chapter 2

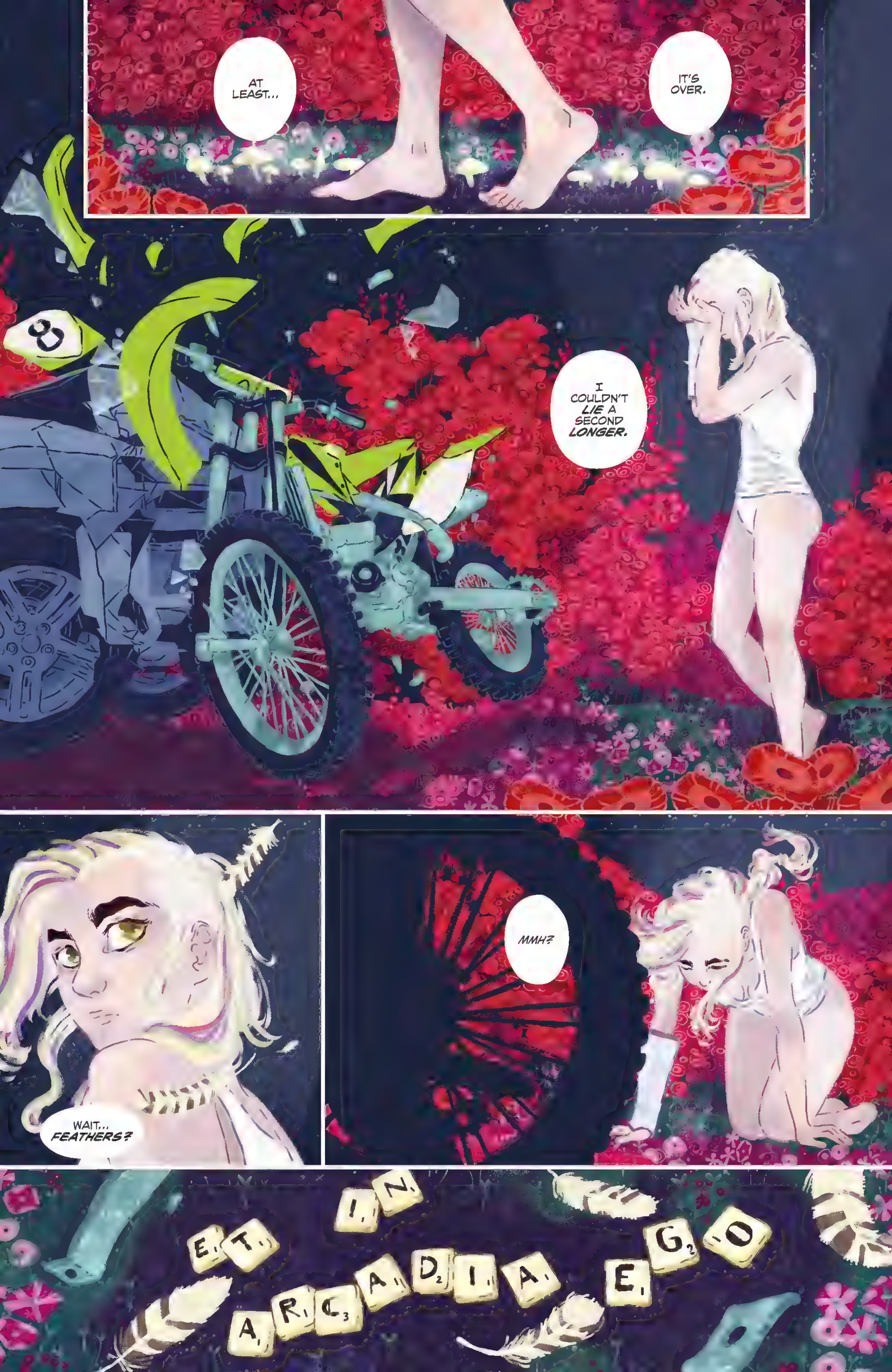


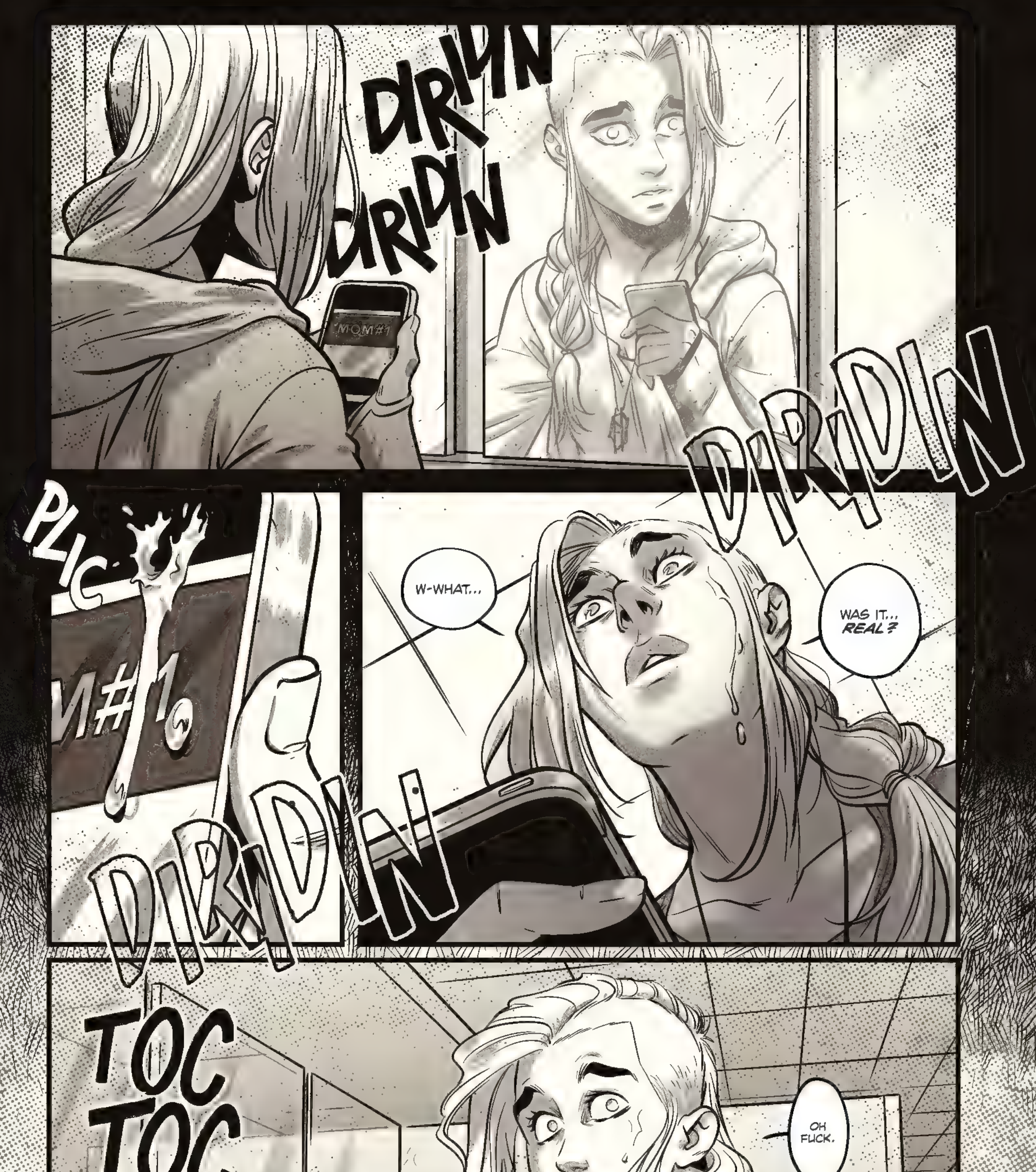

POOR, POOR REBECCA KUMAR...
YOU SURVIVED A DEADLY ACCIDENT, ONLY TO MEET AN END...
...ALL THE MORE TERRIBLE.
DIRIDIN
DIRIDI
DIRI
BUT YOU SHOULD THANK ME, DEAR REBECCA.
NOTHING HOLDS MORE SWAY OVER A MORTAL BODY THAN THE HEART THAT BEATS IN ITS CHEST. WITH YOURS THUS STOLEN...
YOU MAY REST EASY, LUCKY GIRL... AND BE FREE FROM YOUR PAIN.

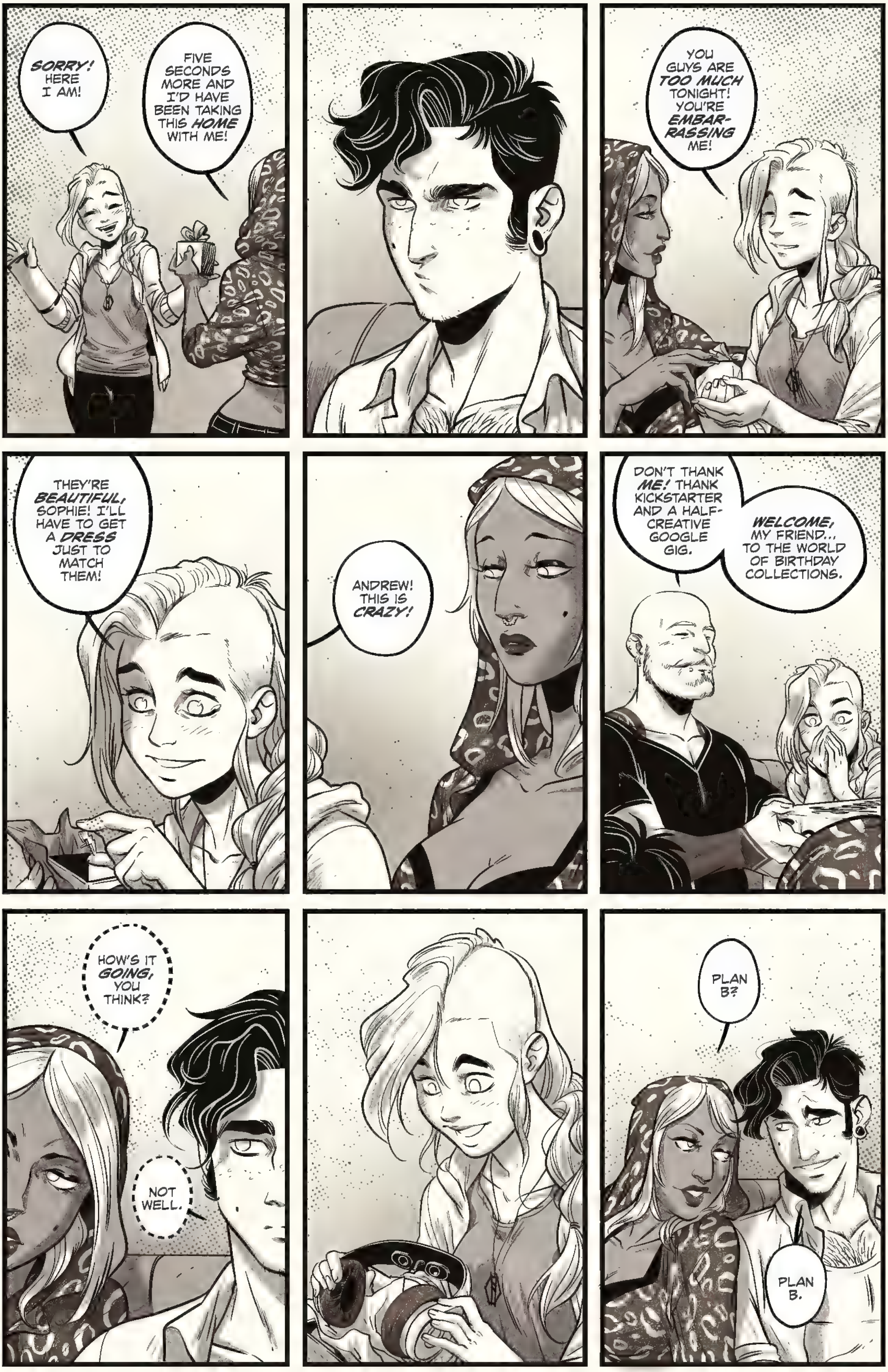

DIRIDIN
DIRIDIN
MOM#1
COME ON, BROTHERS... I DON'T HAVE ALL NIGHT.
ENOUGH, SOPHIE. DAMN... WHEN WE MET YOU WERE LIKE, THE QUEEN OF GAMING OR SOMETHING!
AND NOW... YOU SEEM LIKE SOMEONE COMPLETELY DIFFERENT!
WELL, I HAD A PROBLEM THEN, DHARA.
WAIT...HOW LONG HAS BECKY BEEN GONE?
SHE'S FINE. MAYBE MY AUNT CALLED HER AGAIN...

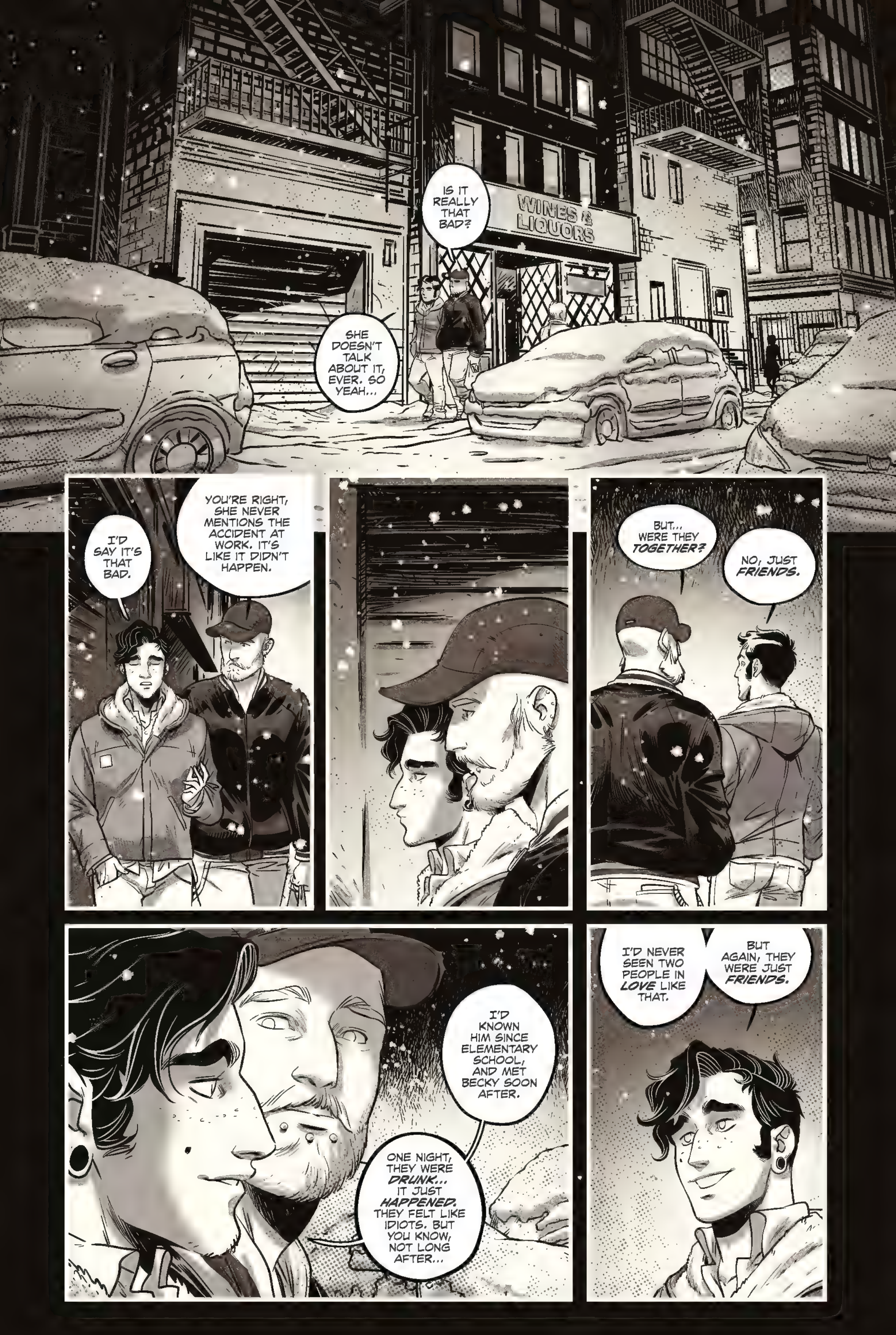

"YOU *KNOW* HOW SHE IS."
KRR
KRR
KRR
KRR
FRR
WHOOAM
KRA
FHUP

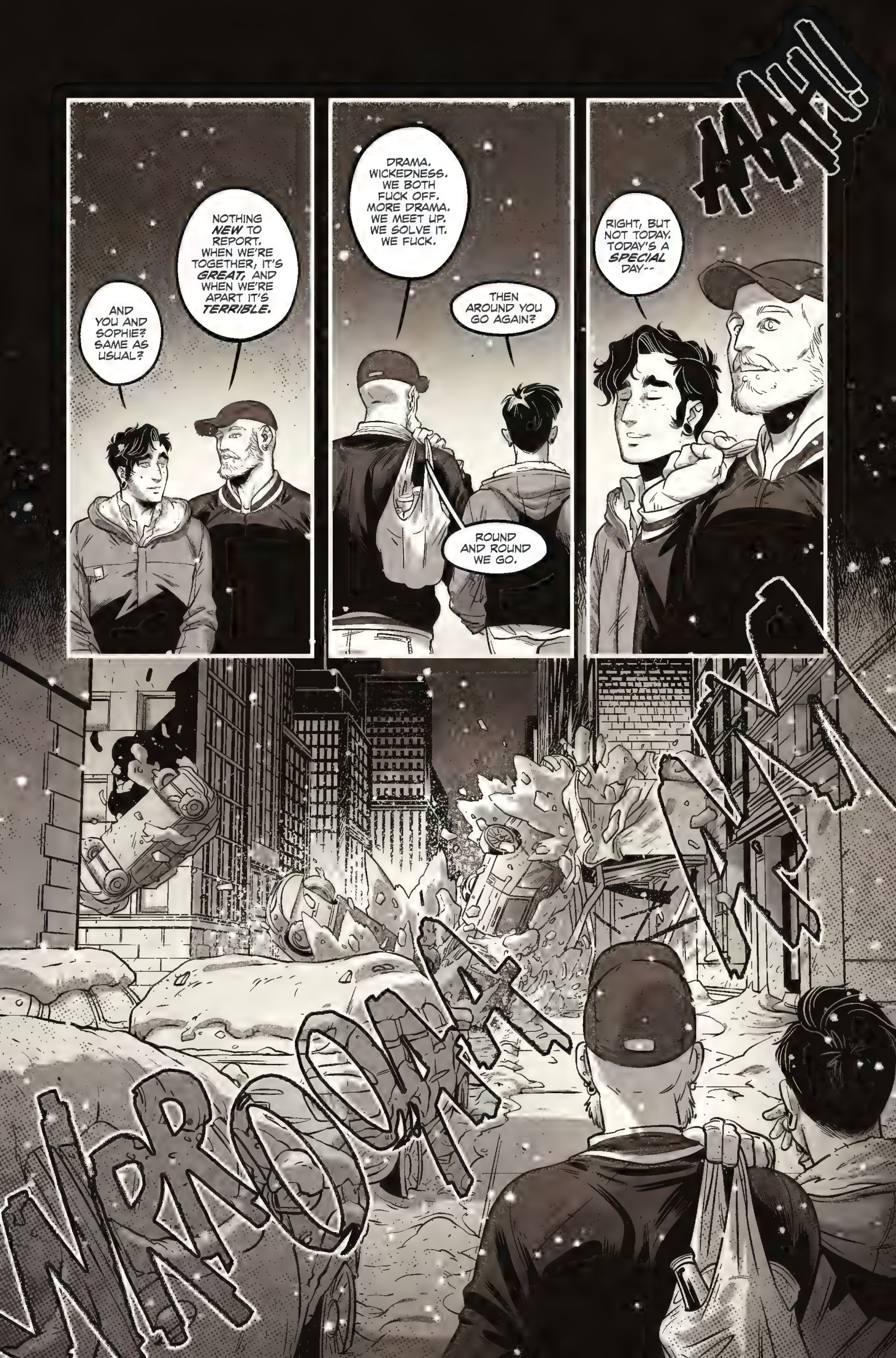

THE *BASTARD* WAS RIGHT...
THE *ACCIDENT* I SURVIVED... IT *MARKED* ME FOR *DEATH.*
I SHOULD HAVE *DIED* FOR REAL.

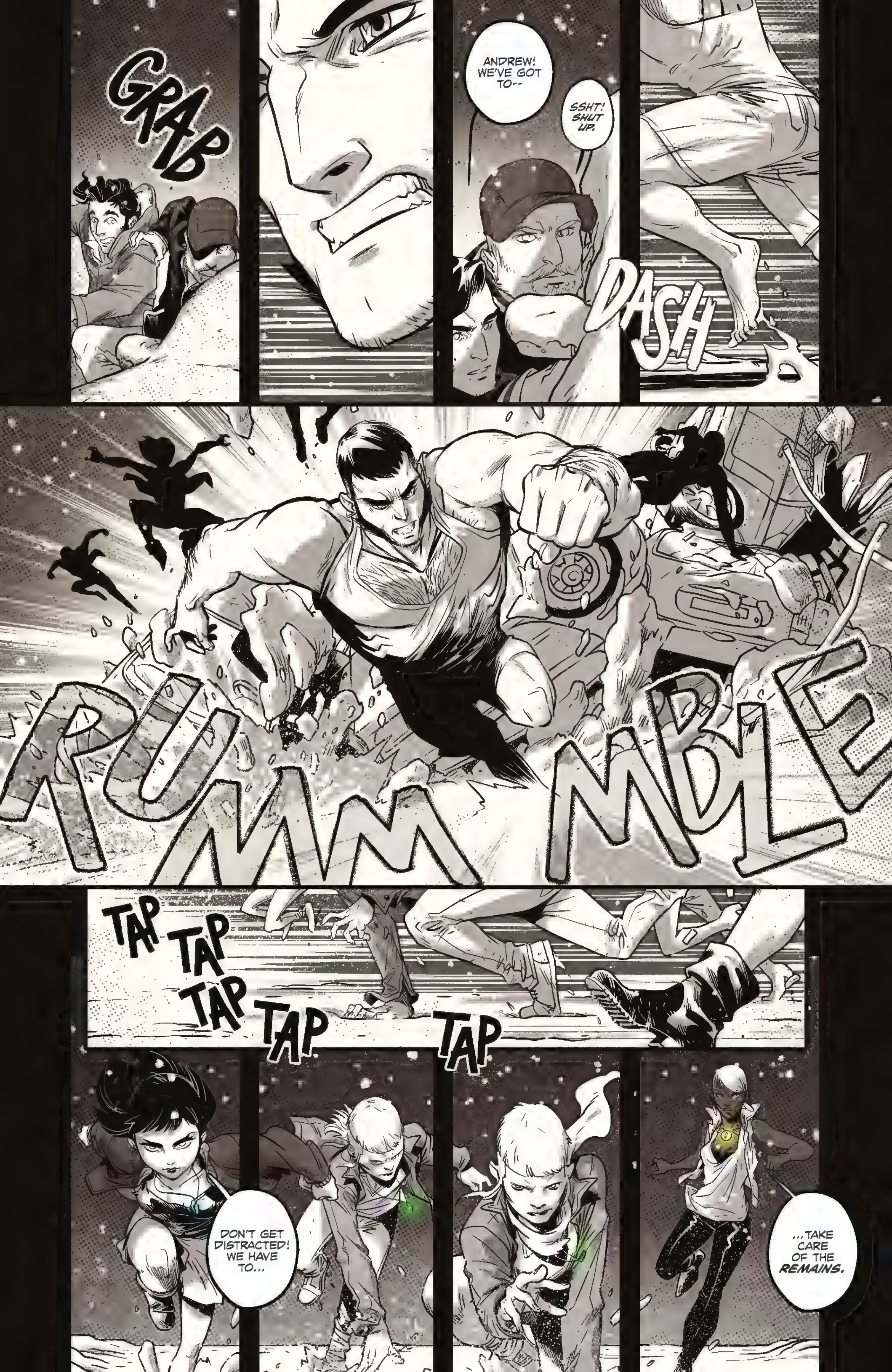

AT LEAST...
IT'S OVER.
I COULDN'T *LIE* A SECOND *LONGER.*
WAIT... *FEATHERS?*
MMH?
ET IN ARCADIA EGO

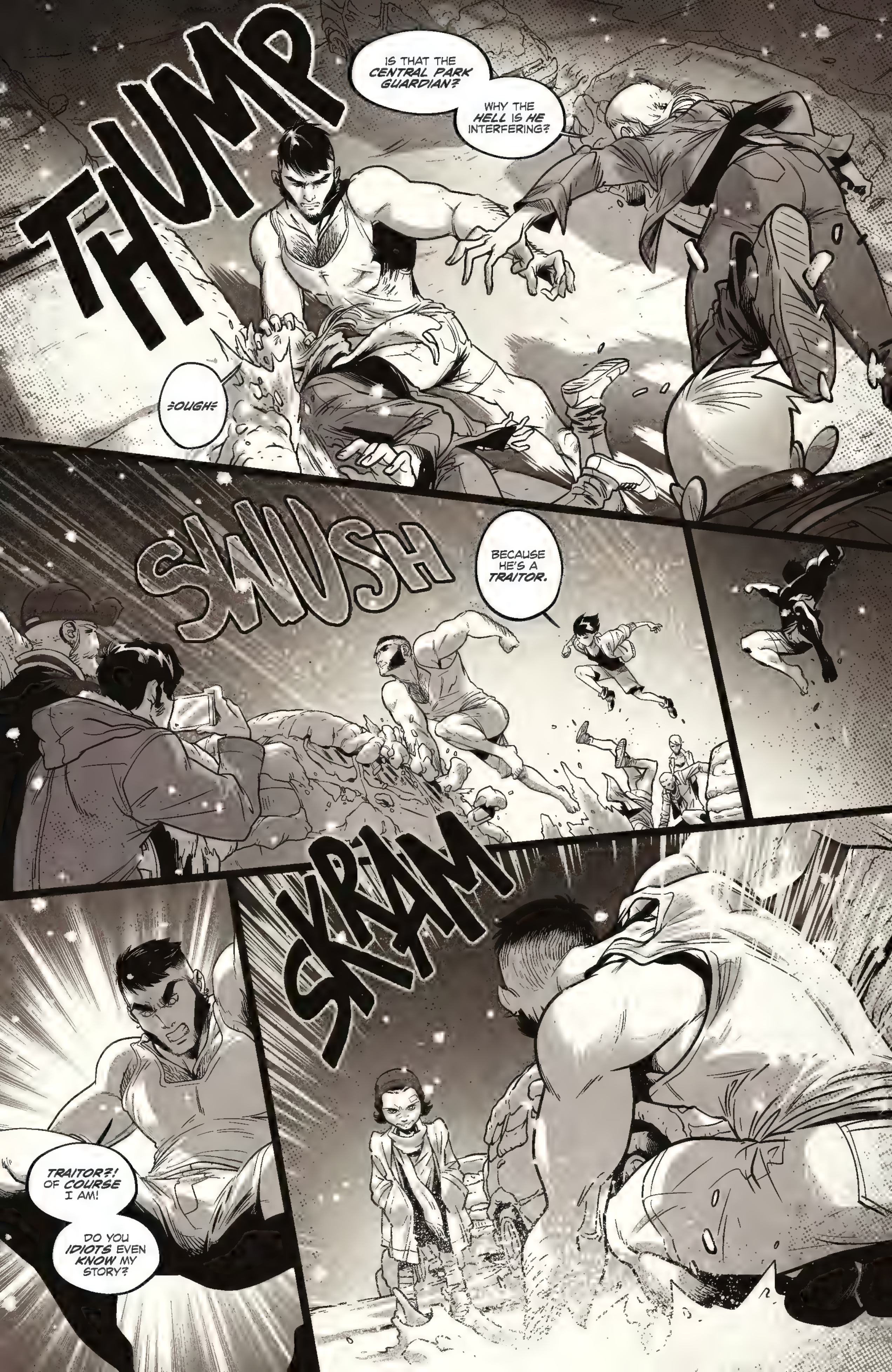

DIRIDIN
DIRIDIN
MOM#1
DIRIDIN
PLIC
M#1
W-WHAT...
WAS IT... *REAL?*
DIRIDIN
TOC TOC
OH FUCK.
BECKY...
YOU ALL RIGHT IN THERE?
1 MISSED CALL

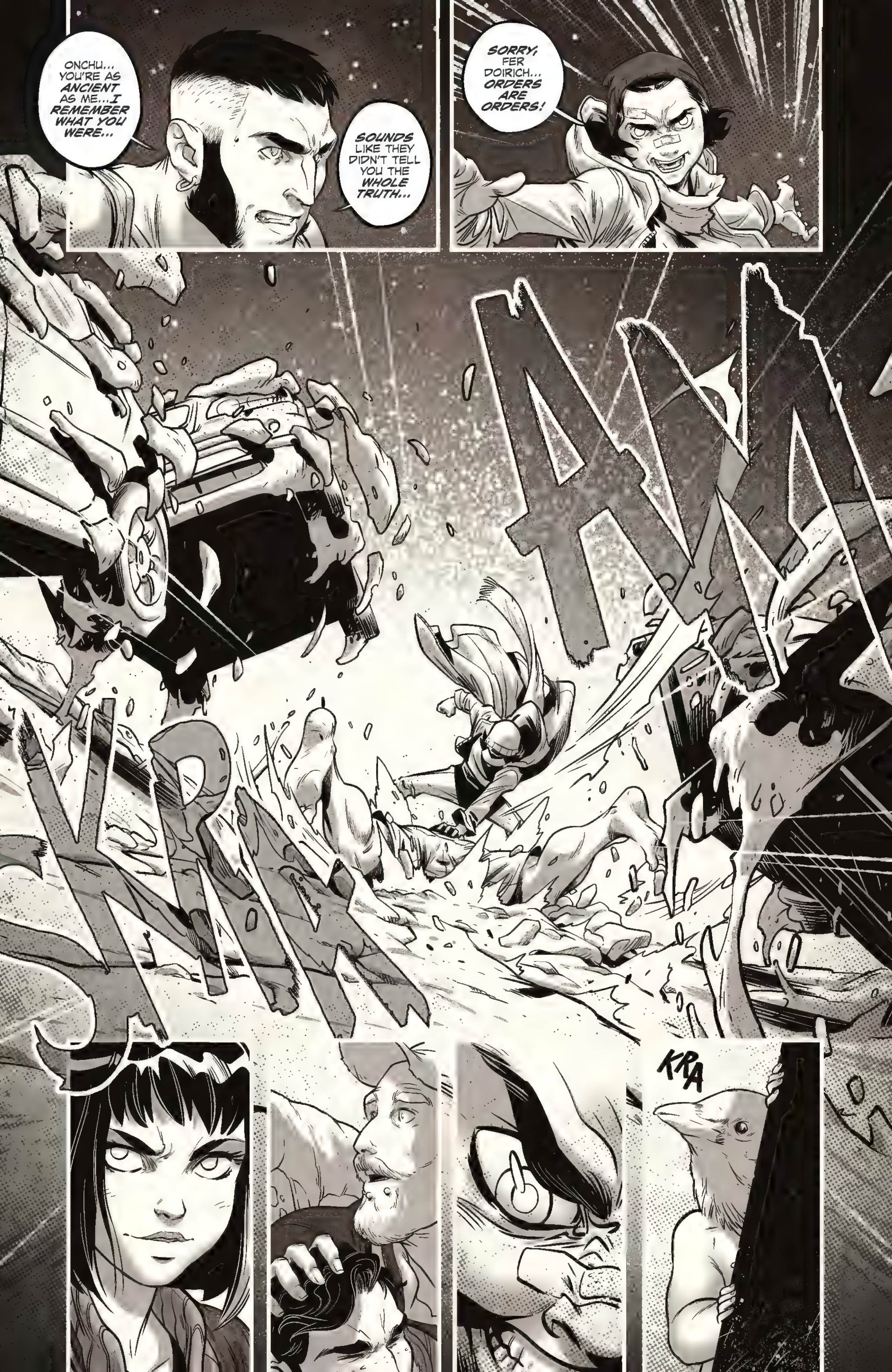

SORRY! HERE I AM!
FIVE SECONDS MORE AND I'D HAVE BEEN TAKING THIS HOME WITH ME!
YOU GUYS ARE TOO MUCH TONIGHT! YOU'RE EMBARRASSING ME!
THEY'RE BEAUTIFUL, SOPHIE! I'LL HAVE TO GET A DRESS JUST TO MATCH THEM!
ANDREW! THIS IS CRAZY!
DON'T THANK ME! THANK KICKSTARTER AND A HALF-CREATIVE GOOGLE GIG.
WELCOME, MY FRIEND... TO THE WORLD OF BIRTHDAY COLLECTIONS.
HOW'S IT GOING, YOU THINK?
NOT WELL.
PLAN B?
PLAN B.

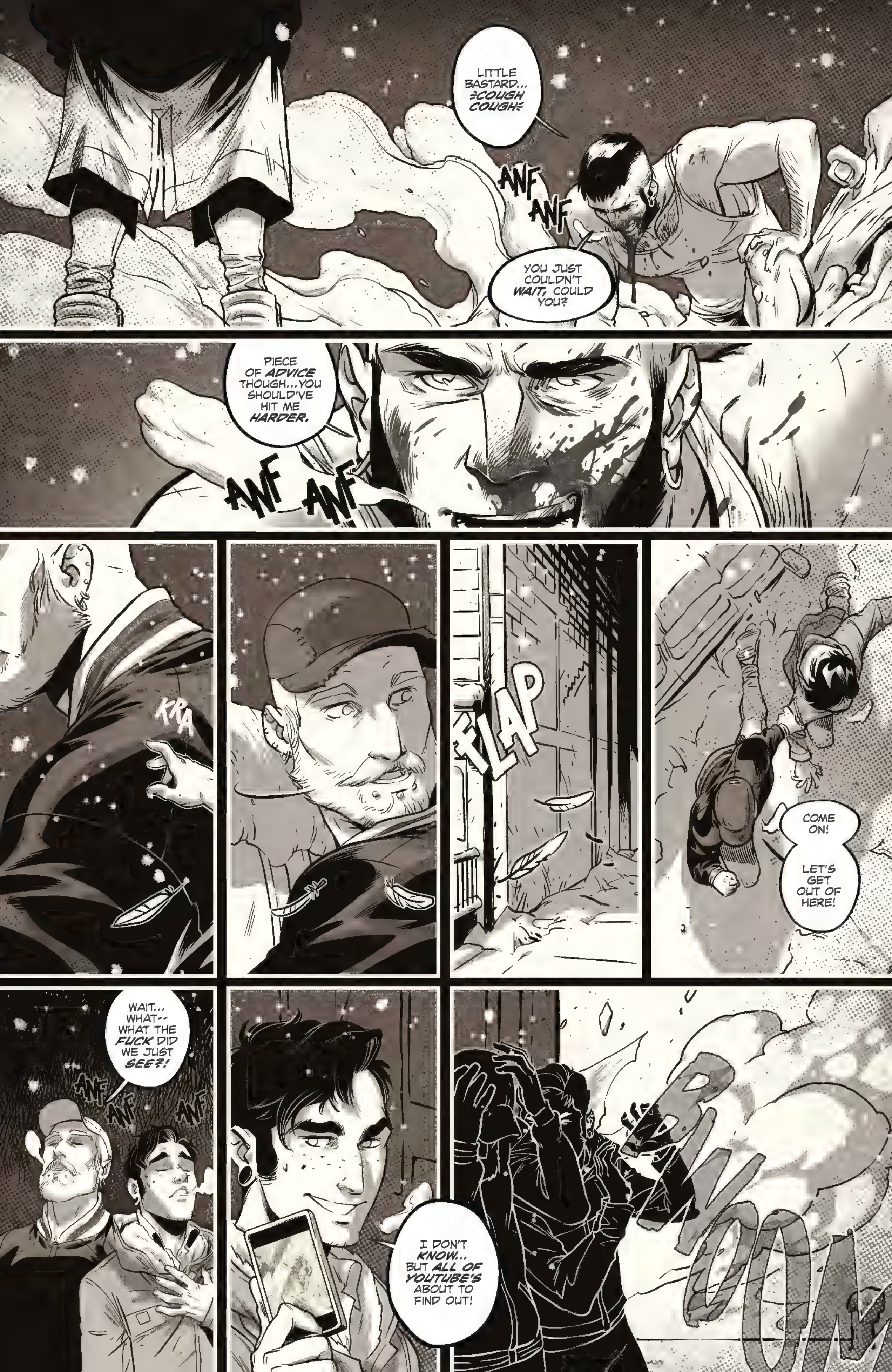

WINES & LIQUORS
IS IT REALLY THAT BAD?
SHE DOESN'T TALK ABOUT IT, EVER. SO YEAH...
YOU'RE RIGHT, SHE NEVER MENTIONS THE ACCIDENT AT WORK. IT'S LIKE IT DIDN'T HAPPEN.
I'D SAY IT'S THAT BAD.
BUT... WERE THEY *TOGETHER?*
NO, JUST *FRIENDS.*
I'D KNOWN HIM SINCE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, AND MET BECKY SOON AFTER.
ONE NIGHT, THEY WERE *DRUNK...* IT JUST *HAPPENED.* THEY FELT LIKE IDIOTS. BUT YOU KNOW, NOT LONG AFTER...
I'D NEVER SEEN TWO PEOPLE IN *LOVE* LIKE THAT.
BUT AGAIN, THEY WERE JUST *FRIENDS.*

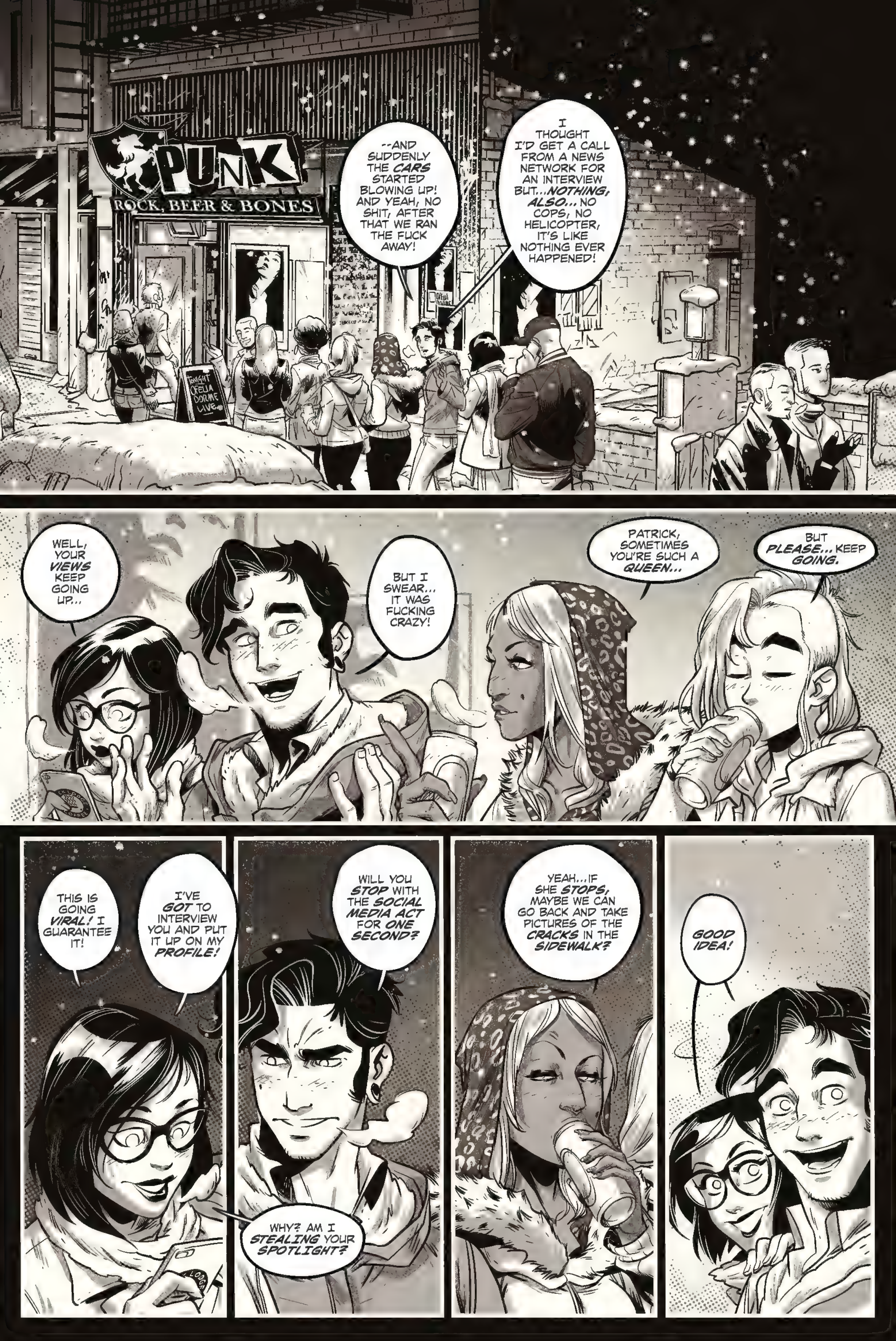

AND YOU AND SOPHIE? SAME AS USUAL?
NOTHING *NEW* TO REPORT. WHEN WE'RE TOGETHER, IT'S *GREAT,* AND WHEN WE'RE APART IT'S *TERRIBLE.*
DRAMA. WICKEDNESS. WE BOTH FUCK OFF. MORE DRAMA. WE MEET UP. WE SOLVE IT. WE FUCK.
THEN AROUND YOU GO AGAIN?
ROUND AND ROUND WE GO.
RIGHT, BUT NOT TODAY. TODAY'S A *SPECIAL* DAY--
AAAH!!
WROOOAMM

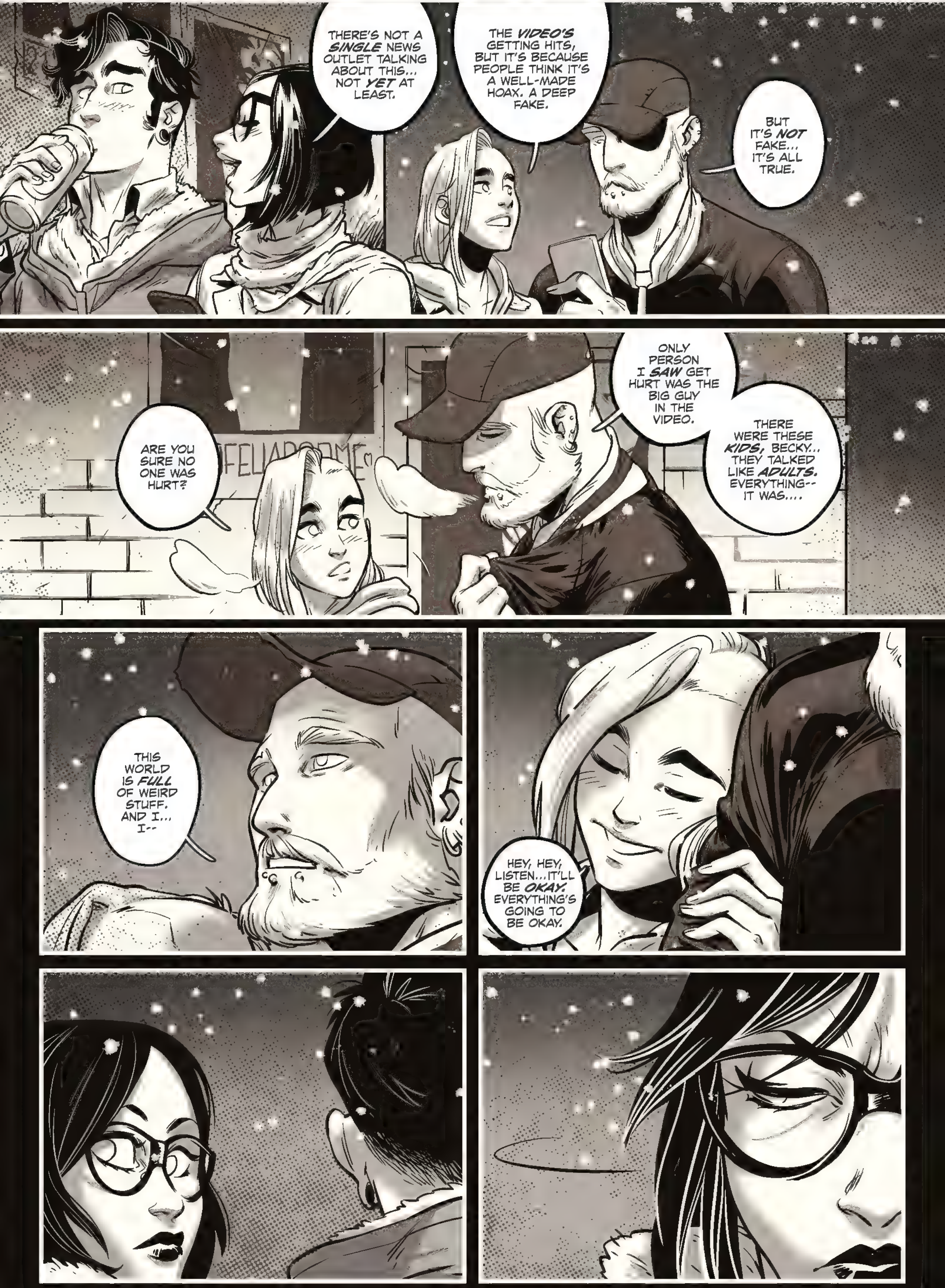

GRAB
ANDREW! WE'VE GOT TO--
SSHT! SHUT UP.
DASH
RUMMMBLE
TAP TAP TAP TAP TAP
DON'T GET DISTRACTED! WE HAVE TO...
...TAKE CARE OF THE *REMAINS.*

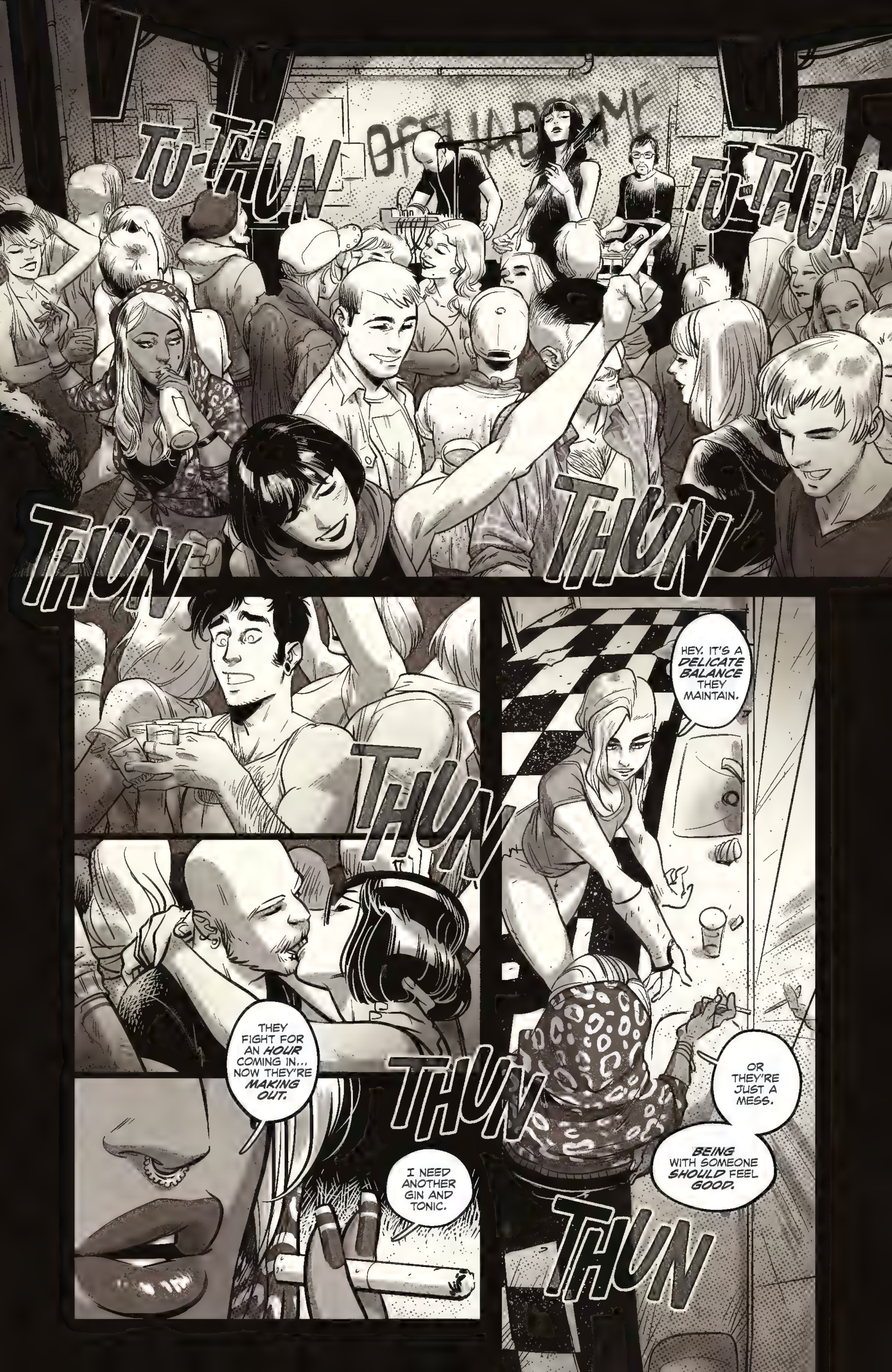

THUMP
IS THAT THE *CENTRAL PARK GUARDIAN?*
WHY THE *HELL* IS *HE* INTERFERING?
OUGH
SWUSH
BECAUSE HE'S A *TRAITOR.*
SKRAM
TRAITOR?! OF *COURSE* I AM!
DO YOU *IDIOTS* EVEN *KNOW* MY STORY?

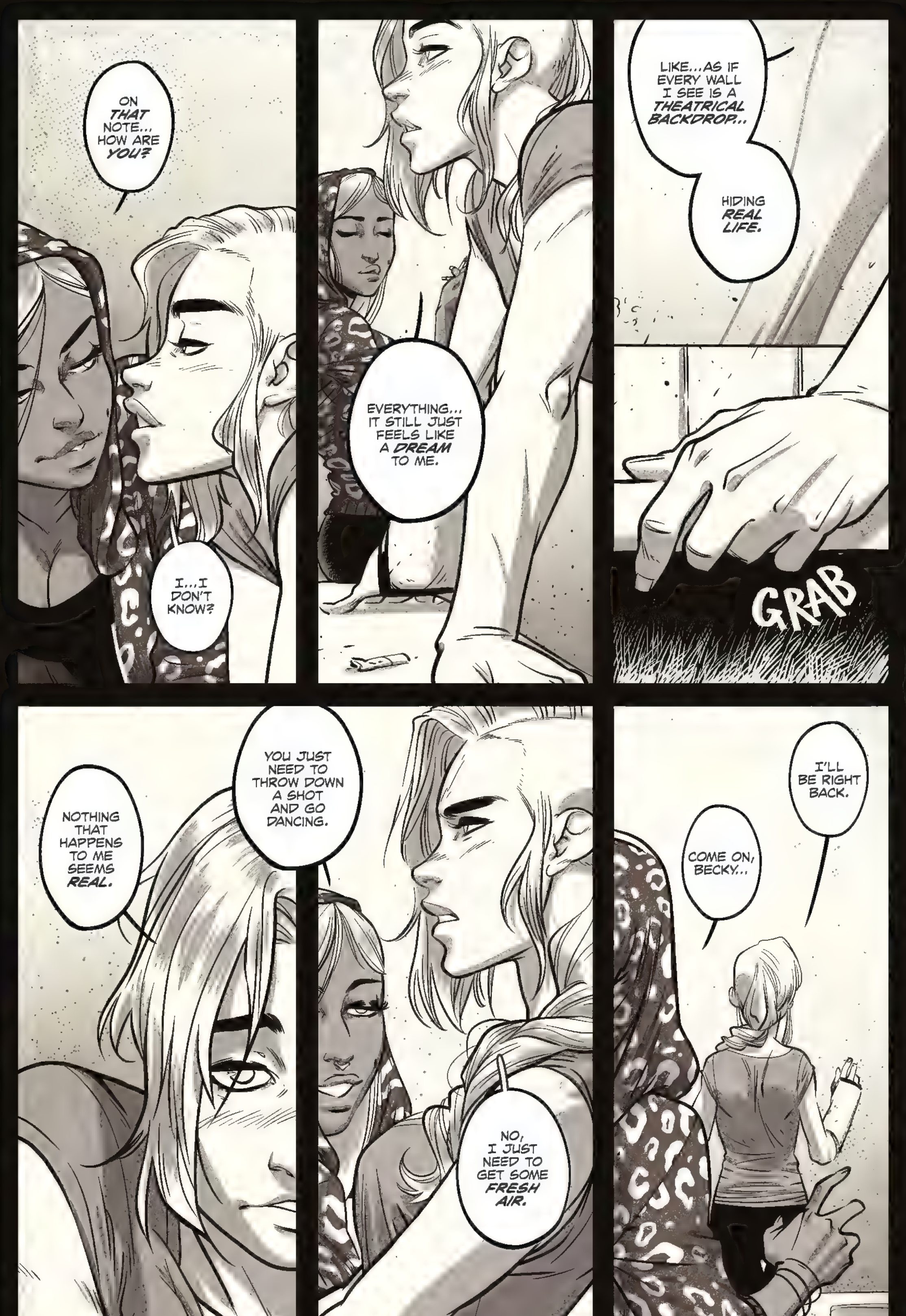

ONCHU... YOU'RE AS *ANCIENT* AS ME... *I REMEMBER WHAT YOU WERE...*
SOUNDS LIKE THEY DIDN'T TELL YOU THE *WHOLE TRUTH...*
SORRY, FER DOIRICH... *ORDERS ARE ORDERS!*
KRA

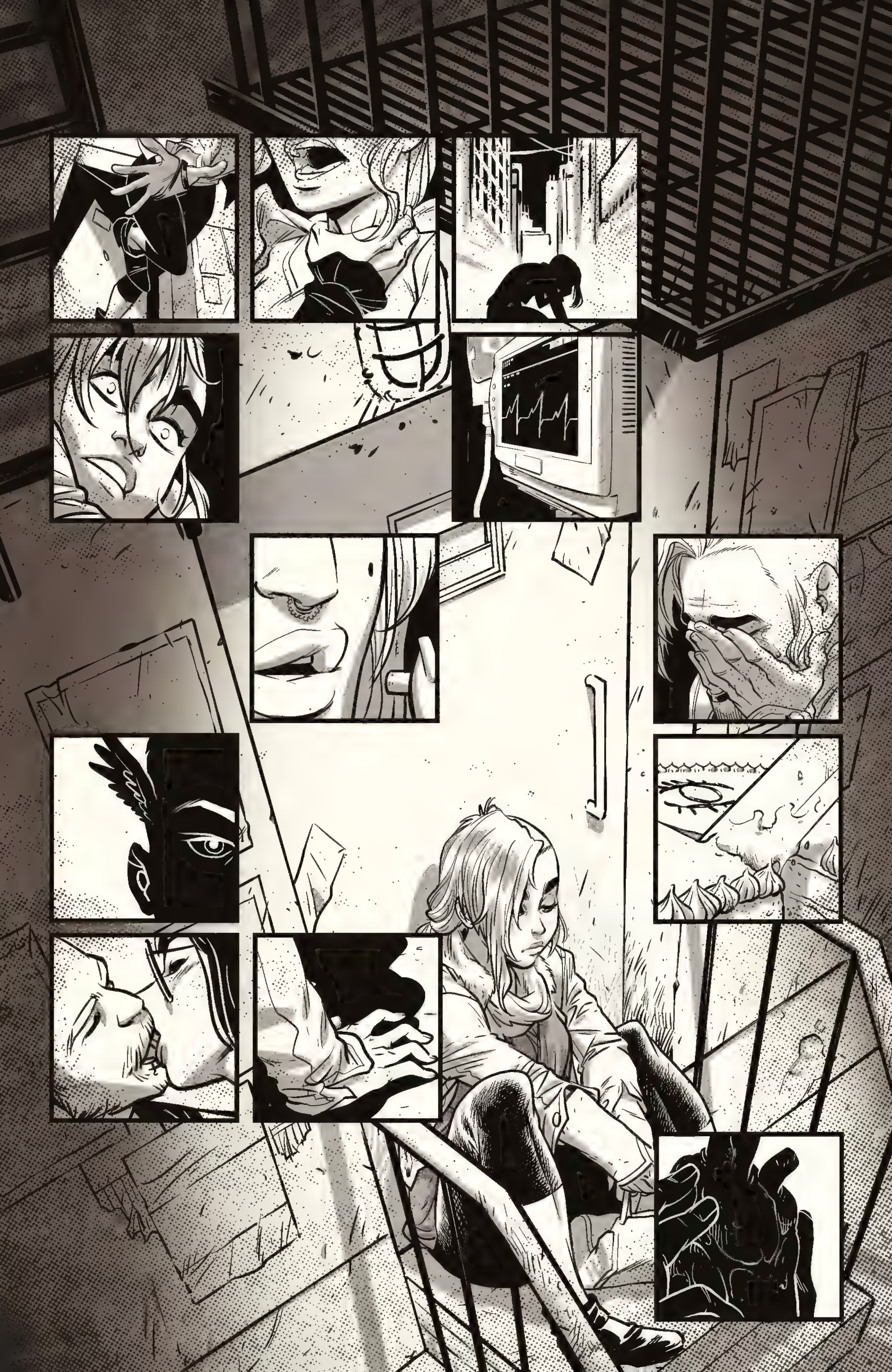

LITTLE BASTARD... ≈COUGH COUGH≈
ANF ANF
YOU JUST COULDN'T WAIT, COULD YOU?
PIECE OF ADVICE THOUGH...YOU SHOULD'VE HIT ME HARDER.
ANF ANF
KRA
FLAP
COME ON!
LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!
WAIT... WHAT-- WHAT THE FUCK DID WE JUST SEE?!
ANF ANF ANF
I DON'T KNOW... BUT ALL OF YOUTUBE'S ABOUT TO FIND OUT!
BOOM

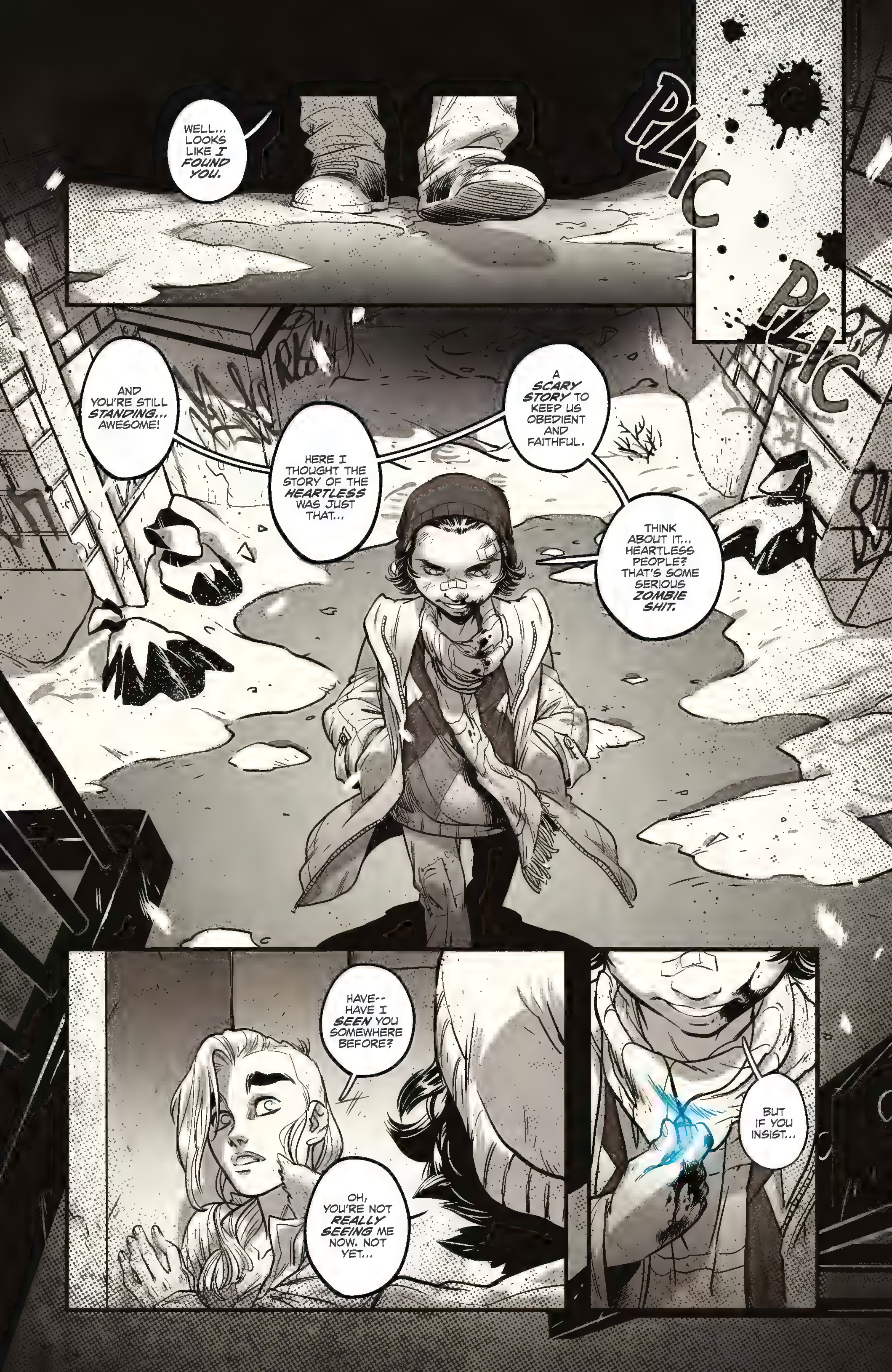

PUNK
ROCK, BEER & BONES
TONIGHT OFELIA DORME LIVE
--AND SUDDENLY THE *CARS* STARTED BLOWING UP! AND YEAH, NO SHIT, AFTER THAT WE RAN THE FUCK AWAY!
I THOUGHT I'D GET A CALL FROM A NEWS NETWORK FOR AN INTERVIEW BUT... *NOTHING, ALSO...* NO COPS, NO HELICOPTER, IT'S LIKE NOTHING EVER HAPPENED!
WELL, YOUR *VIEWS* KEEP GOING UP...
BUT I SWEAR... IT WAS FUCKING CRAZY!
PATRICK, SOMETIMES YOU'RE SUCH A *QUEEN*...
BUT *PLEASE...* KEEP *GOING.*
THIS IS GOING *VIRAL!* I GUARANTEE IT!
I'VE *GOT* TO INTERVIEW YOU AND PUT IT UP ON MY *PROFILE!*
WILL YOU *STOP* WITH THE *SOCIAL MEDIA ACT* FOR *ONE SECOND?*
WHY? AM I *STEALING* YOUR *SPOTLIGHT?*
YEAH... IF SHE *STOPS,* MAYBE WE CAN GO BACK AND TAKE PICTURES OF THE *CRACKS* IN THE *SIDEWALK?*
GOOD IDEA!

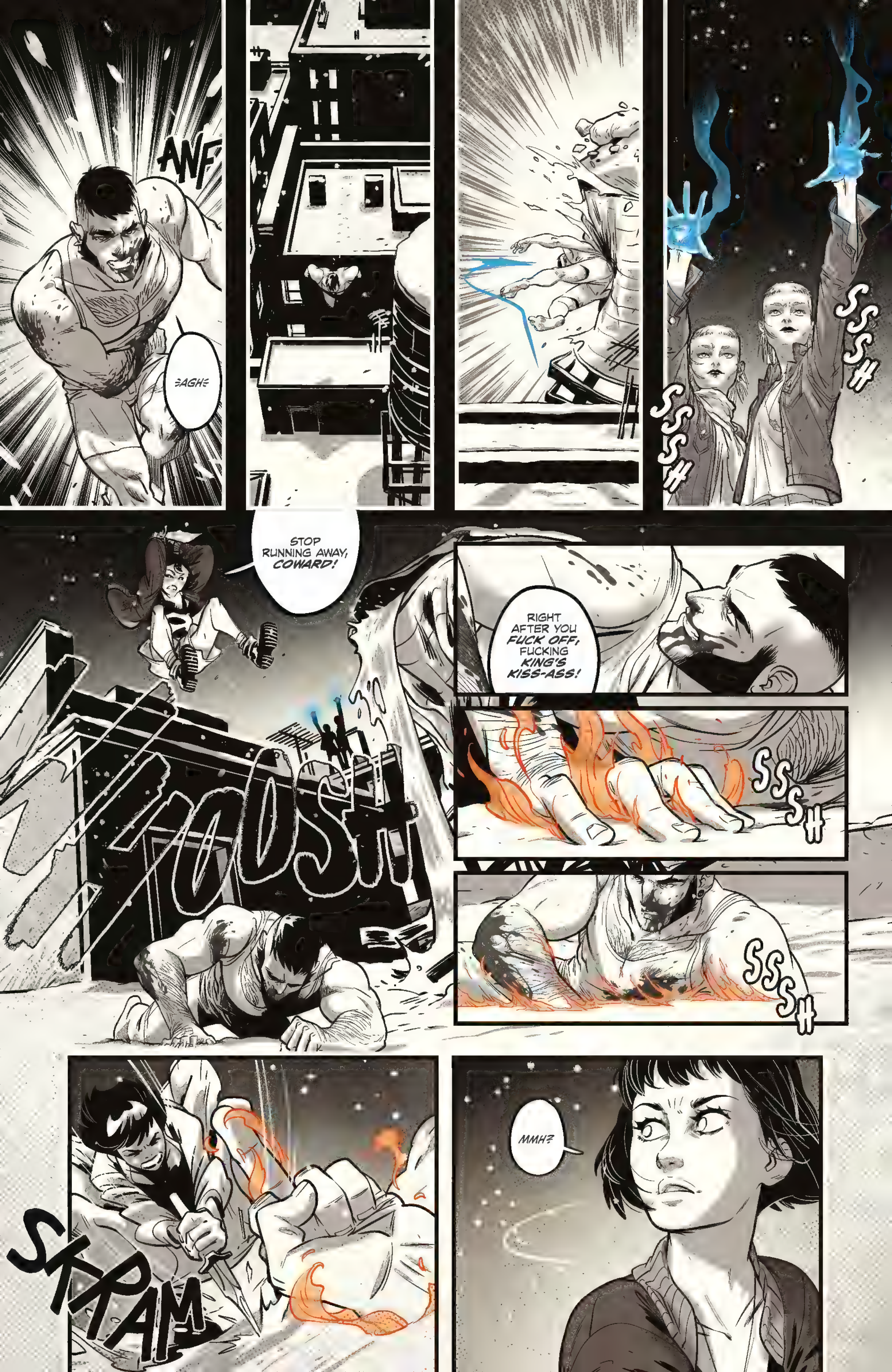

THERE'S NOT A *SINGLE* NEWS OUTLET TALKING ABOUT THIS... NOT *YET* AT LEAST.
THE *VIDEO'S* GETTING HITS, BUT IT'S BECAUSE PEOPLE THINK IT'S A WELL-MADE HOAX. A DEEP FAKE.
BUT IT'S *NOT* FAKE... IT'S ALL TRUE.
ARE YOU SURE NO ONE WAS HURT?
ONLY PERSON I *SAW* GET HURT WAS THE BIG GUY IN THE VIDEO.
THERE WERE THESE *KIDS,* BECKY... THEY TALKED LIKE *ADULTS.* EVERYTHING-- IT WAS....
THIS WORLD IS *FULL* OF WEIRD STUFF. AND I... I--
HEY, HEY, LISTEN...IT'LL BE *OKAY.* EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE OKAY.

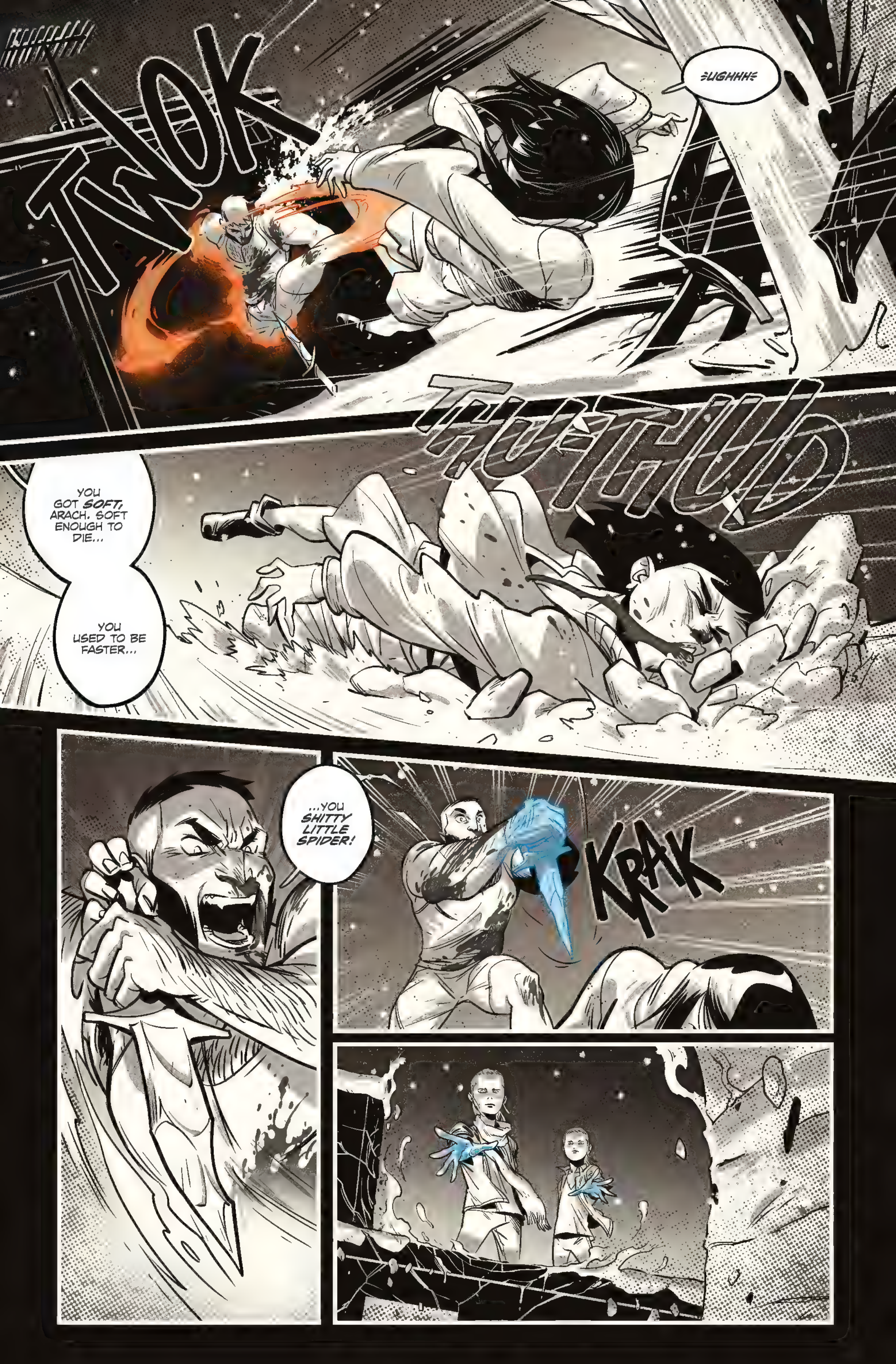

TU-THUN
TU-THUN
THUN
THUN
THUN
HEY. IT'S A *DELICATE BALANCE* THEY MAINTAIN.
THEY FIGHT FOR AN *HOUR* COMING IN... NOW THEY'RE *MAKING OUT.*
THUN
OR THEY'RE JUST A MESS.
BEING WITH SOMEONE *SHOULD* FEEL *GOOD.*
I NEED ANOTHER GIN AND TONIC.
THUN

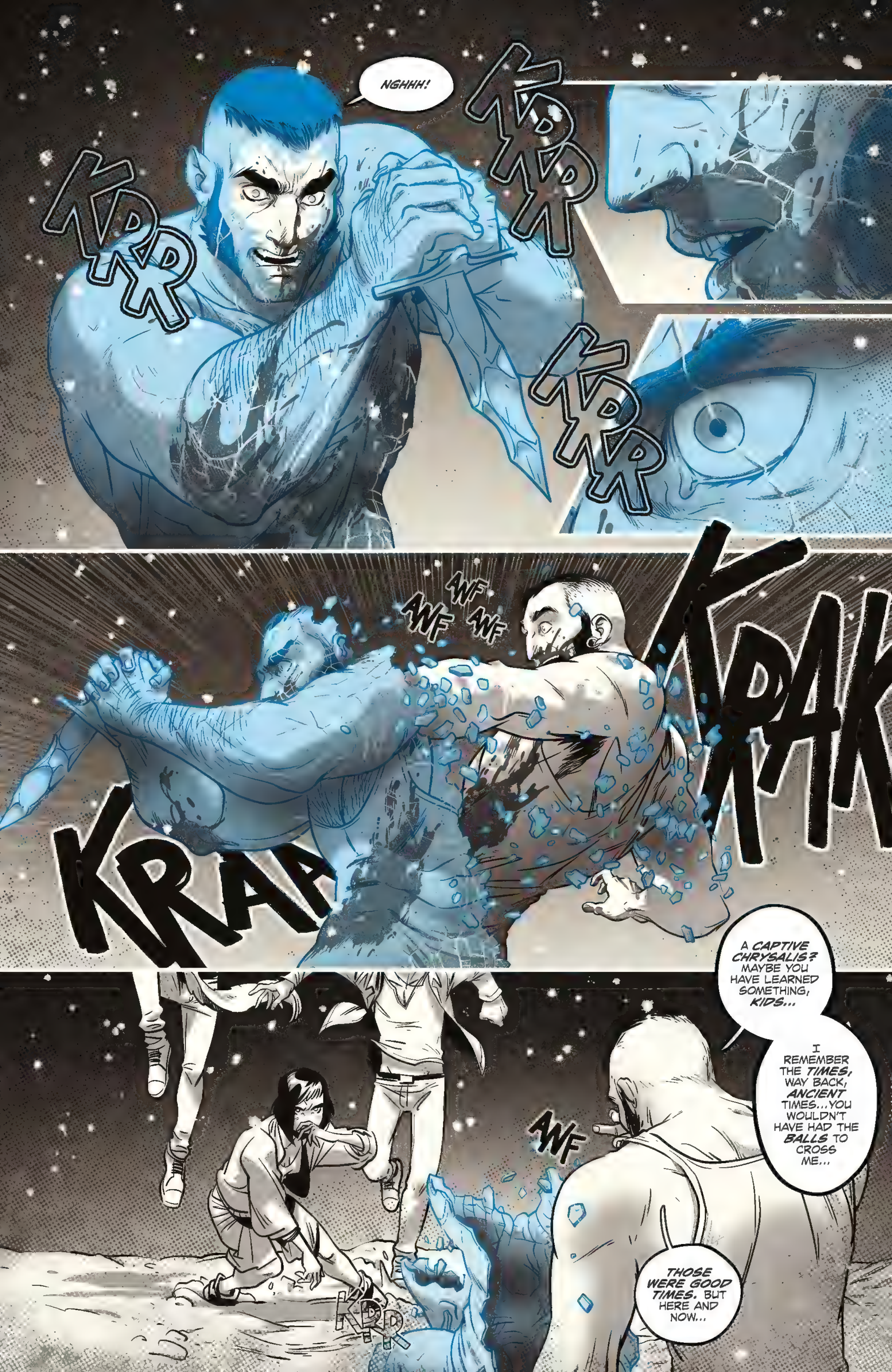

ON THAT NOTE... HOW ARE YOU?
I...I DON'T KNOW?
EVERYTHING... IT STILL JUST FEELS LIKE A DREAM TO ME.
LIKE...AS IF EVERY WALL I SEE IS A THEATRICAL BACKDROP...
HIDING REAL LIFE.
GRAB
NOTHING THAT HAPPENS TO ME SEEMS REAL.
YOU JUST NEED TO THROW DOWN A SHOT AND GO DANCING.
NO, I JUST NEED TO GET SOME FRESH AIR.
I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.
COME ON, BECKY...

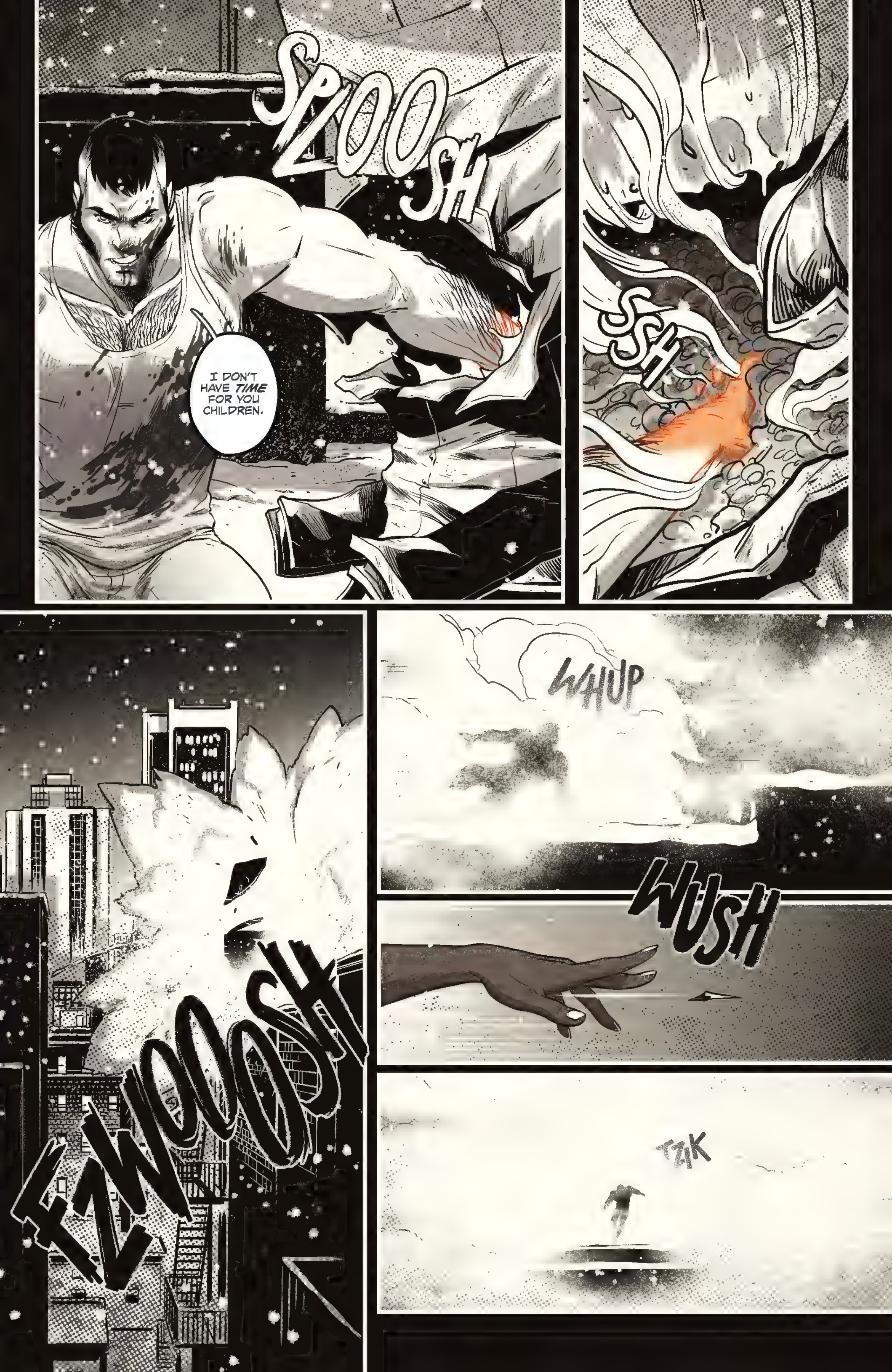


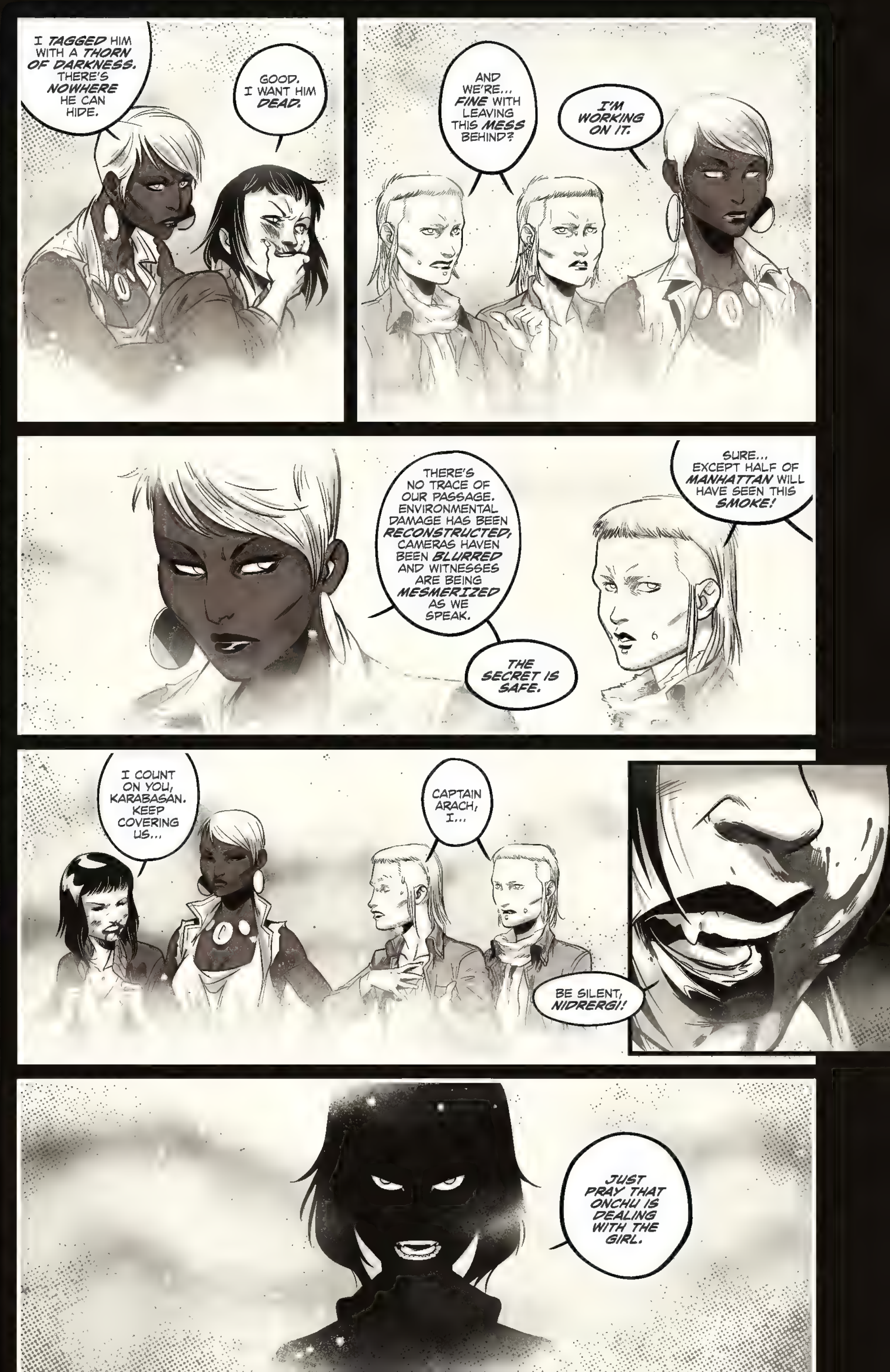

WELL... LOOKS LIKE *I FOUND YOU.*
PLIC
PLIC
PLIC
AND YOU'RE STILL *STANDING...* AWESOME!
HERE I THOUGHT THE STORY OF THE *HEARTLESS* WAS JUST THAT...
A *SCARY STORY* TO KEEP US OBEDIENT AND FAITHFUL.
THINK ABOUT IT... HEARTLESS PEOPLE? THAT'S SOME SERIOUS *ZOMBIE SHIT.*
HAVE-- HAVE I *SEEN* YOU SOMEWHERE BEFORE?
OH, YOU'RE NOT *REALLY SEEING* ME NOW. NOT YET...
BUT IF YOU INSIST...

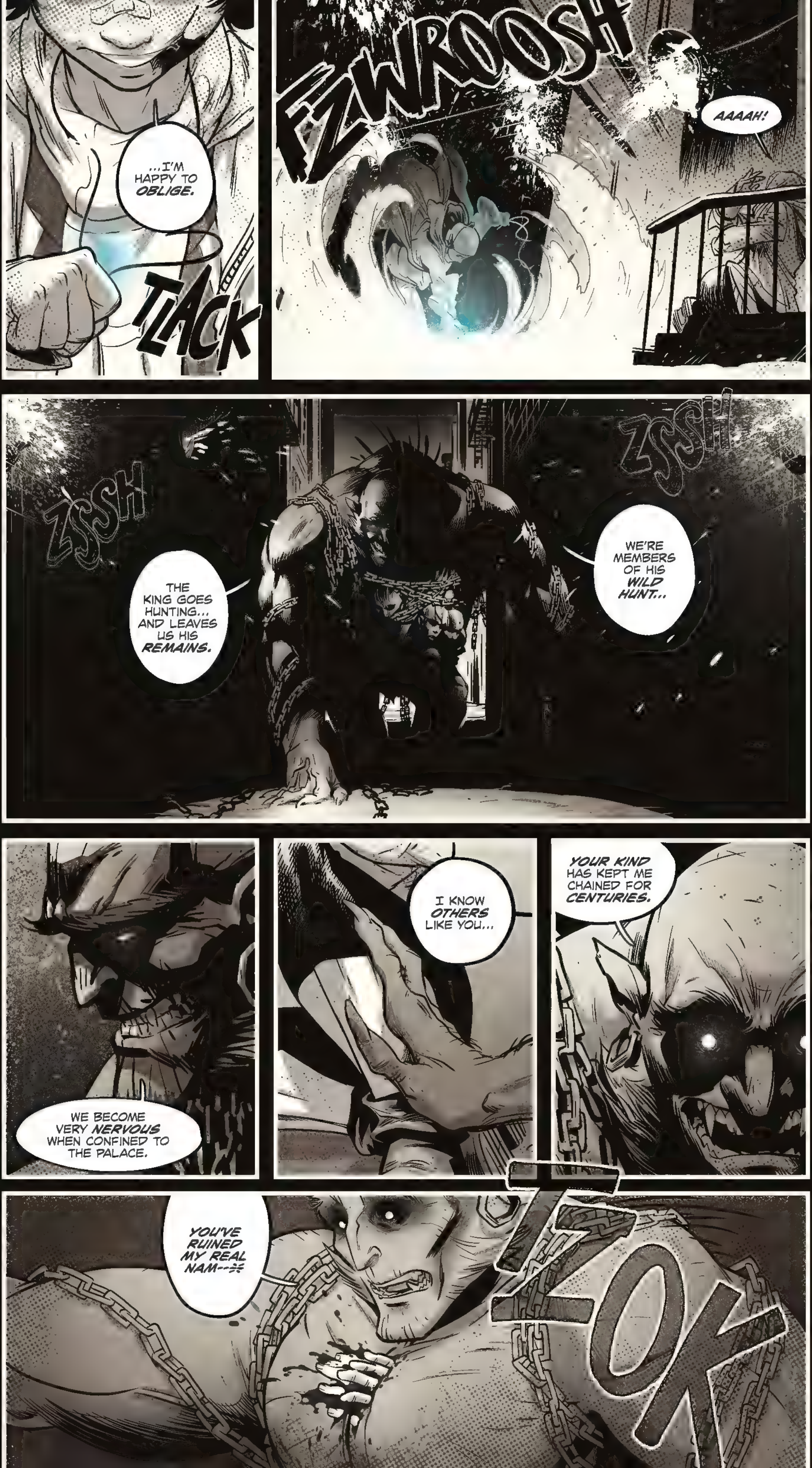

ANF
AGH
SSSH
SSSH
STOP RUNNING AWAY, *COWARD!*
RIGHT AFTER YOU *FUCK OFF,* FUCKING *KING'S KISS-ASS!*
WOOSH
SSSH
SSSH
SKRAM
MMH?

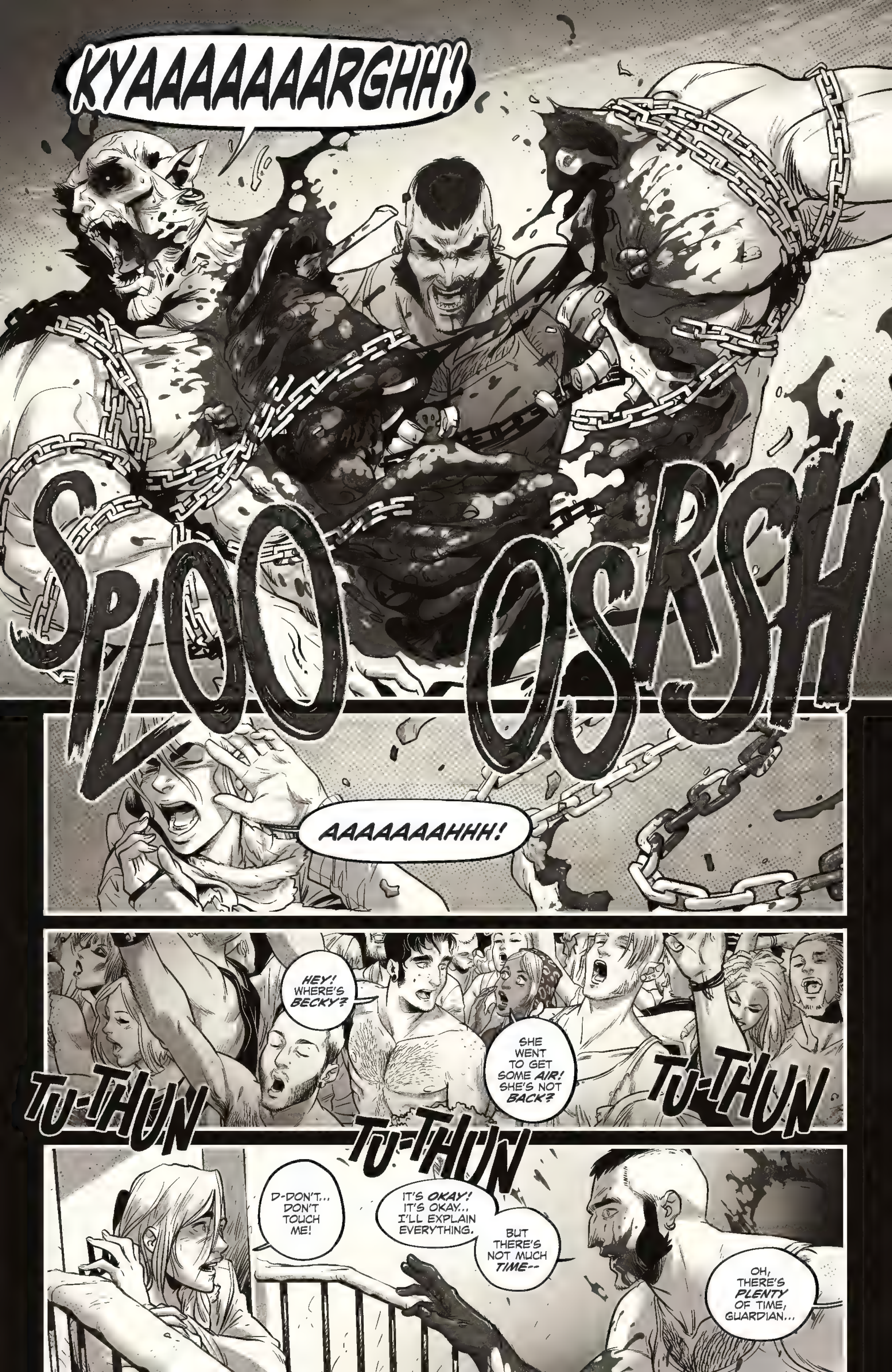

TNOK
UGHHH
THUTHUD
YOU GOT *SOFT,* ARACH. SOFT ENOUGH TO DIE...
YOU USED TO BE FASTER...
...YOU *SHITTY LITTLE SPIDER!*
KRAK

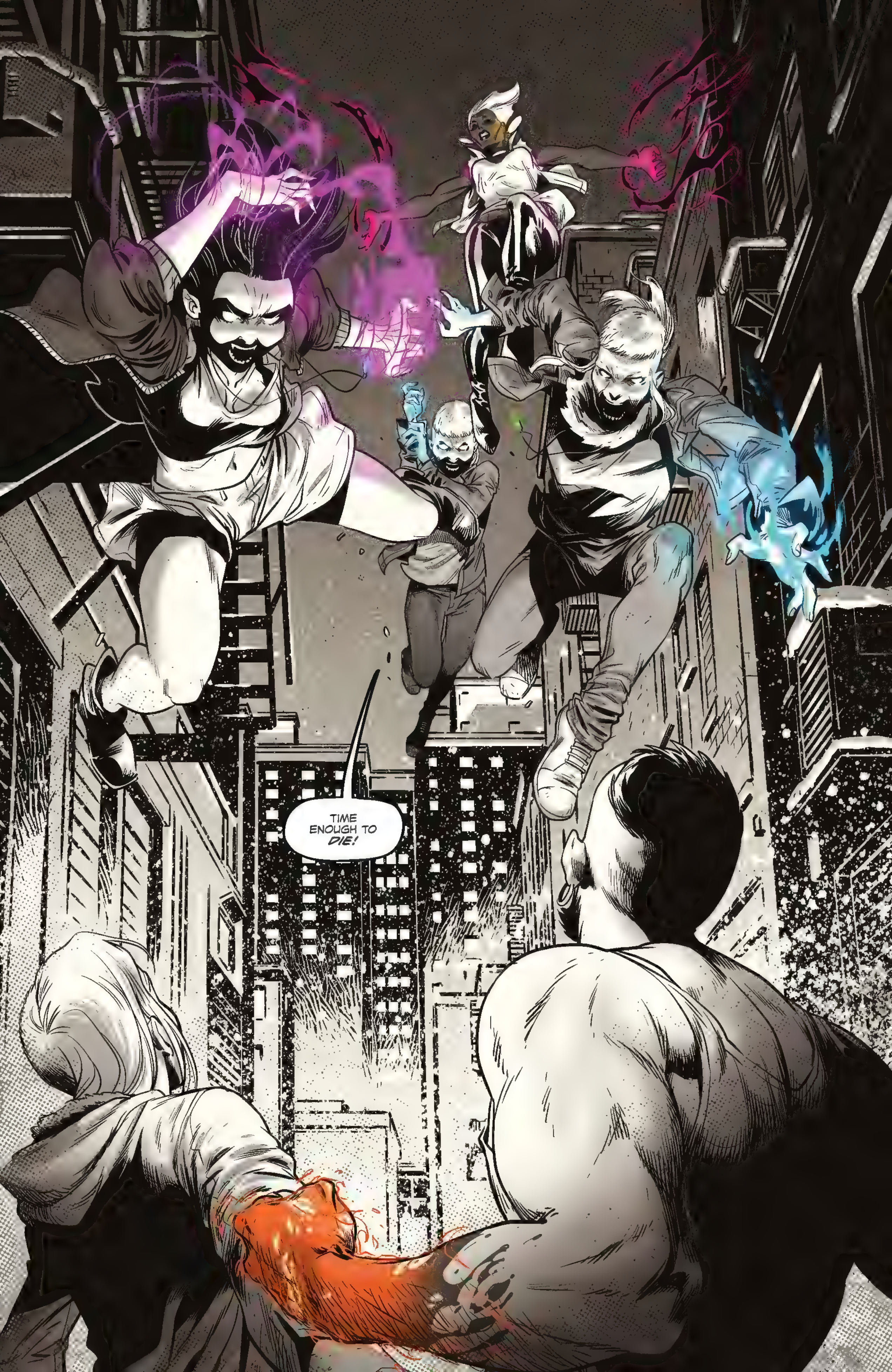

NGHHH!
KRR
KRR
KRR
ANF
ANF
ANF
KRAK
KRAA
A *CAPTIVE CHRYSALIS?* MAYBE YOU HAVE LEARNED SOMETHING, *KIDS*...
I REMEMBER THE *TIMES,* WAY BACK, *ANCIENT* TIMES...YOU WOULDN'T HAVE HAD THE *BALLS* TO CROSS ME...
ANF
THOSE WERE GOOD TIMES. BUT HERE AND NOW...
KRR


SPLOOSH
I DON'T HAVE *TIME* FOR YOU CHILDREN.
SSH
FZWOOOSH
WHUP
WUSH
TZIK

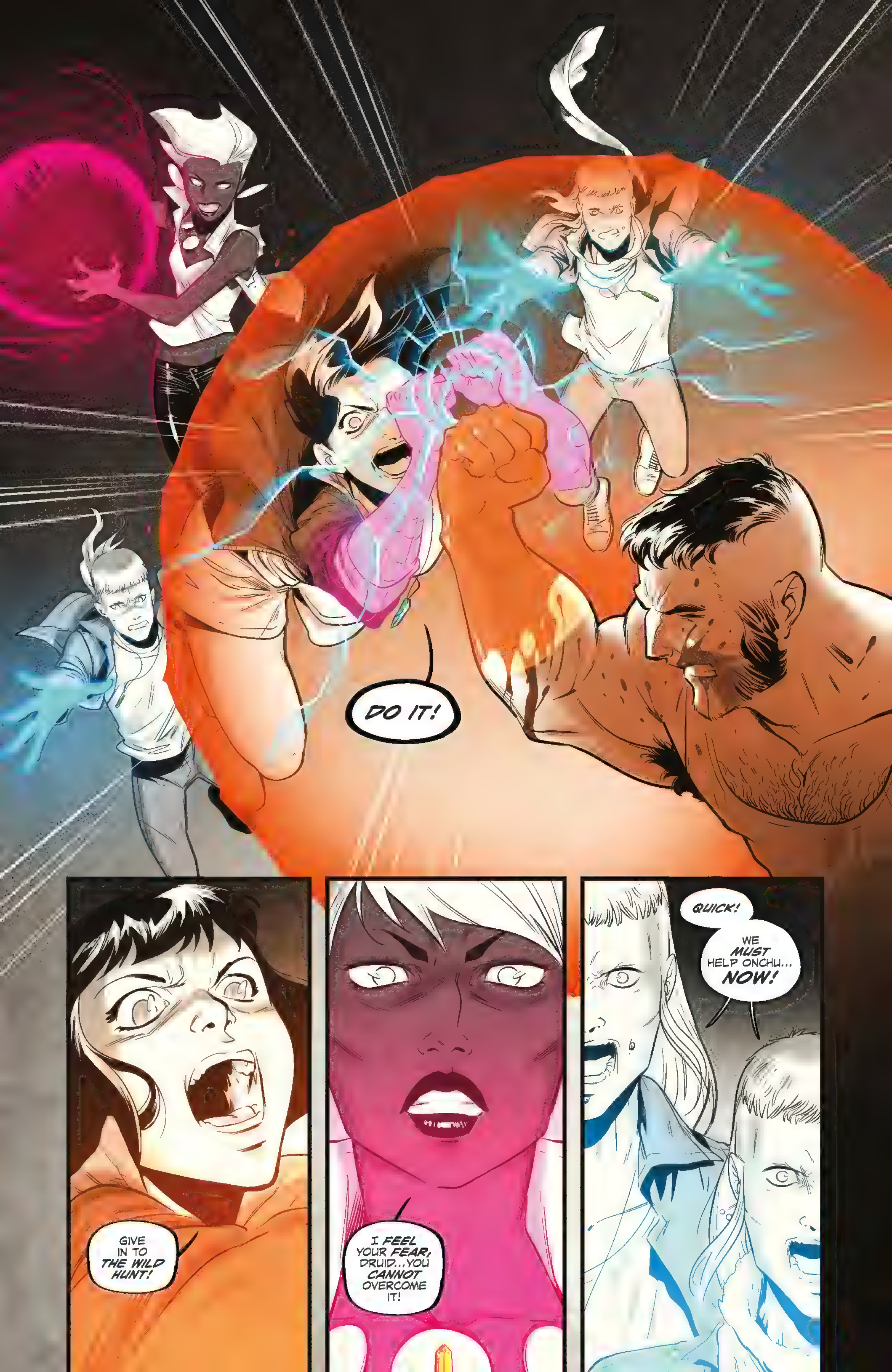

I *TAGGED* HIM WITH A *THORN OF DARKNESS.* THERE'S *NOWHERE* HE CAN HIDE.
GOOD. I WANT HIM *DEAD.*
AND WE'RE... *FINE* WITH LEAVING THIS *MESS* BEHIND?
I'M WORKING ON IT.
THERE'S NO TRACE OF OUR PASSAGE. ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE HAS BEEN *RECONSTRUCTED,* CAMERAS HAVEN BEEN *BLURRED* AND WITNESSES ARE BEING *MESMERIZED* AS WE SPEAK.
THE SECRET IS SAFE.
SURE... EXCEPT HALF OF *MANHATTAN* WILL HAVE SEEN THIS *SMOKE!*
I COUNT ON YOU, KARABASAN. KEEP COVERING US...
CAPTAIN ARACH, I...
BE SILENT, *NIDRERGI!*
JUST PRAY THAT ONCHU IS DEALING WITH THE GIRL.

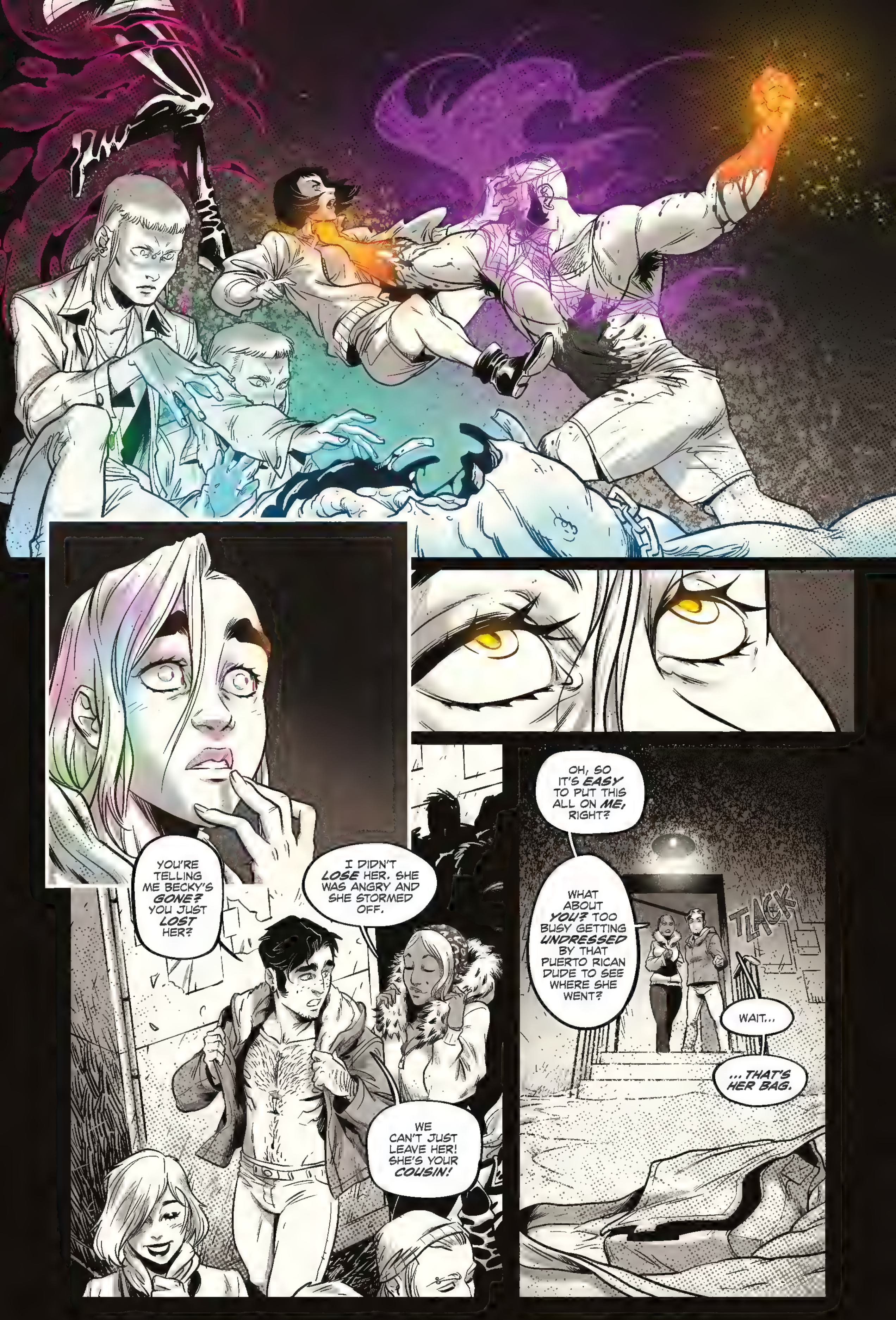

...I'M HAPPY TO *OBLIGE.*
TLACK
FZWROOSH
AAAAH!
ZSSH
THE KING GOES HUNTING... AND LEAVES US HIS *REMAINS.*
ZSSH
WE'RE MEMBERS OF HIS *WILD HUNT...*
WE BECOME VERY *NERVOUS* WHEN CONFINED TO THE PALACE.
I KNOW *OTHERS* LIKE YOU...
YOUR KIND HAS KEPT ME CHAINED FOR *CENTURIES.*
YOU'VE RUINED MY REAL NAM--
ZOK

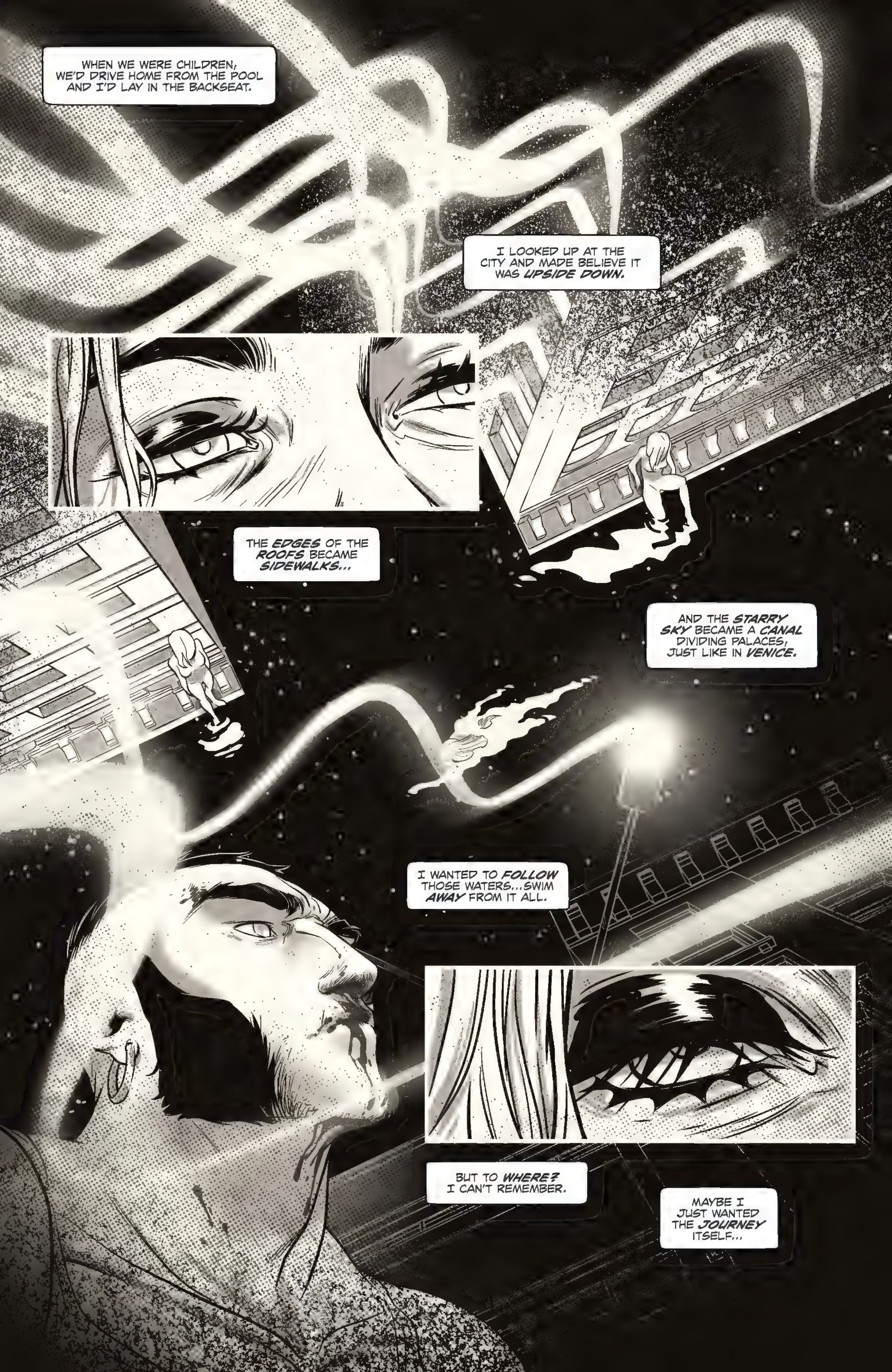

KYAAAAAAAARGHH!
SPZOOOSRSH
AAAAAAAHHH!
HEY! WHERE'S *BECKY?*
SHE WENT TO GET SOME *AIR!* SHE'S NOT *BACK?*
TU-THUN
TU-THUN
TU-THUN
D-DON'T... DON'T TOUCH ME!
IT'S *OKAY!* IT'S OKAY... I'LL EXPLAIN EVERYTHING.
BUT THERE'S NOT MUCH *TIME--*
OH, THERE'S *PLENTY* OF TIME, GUARDIAN...

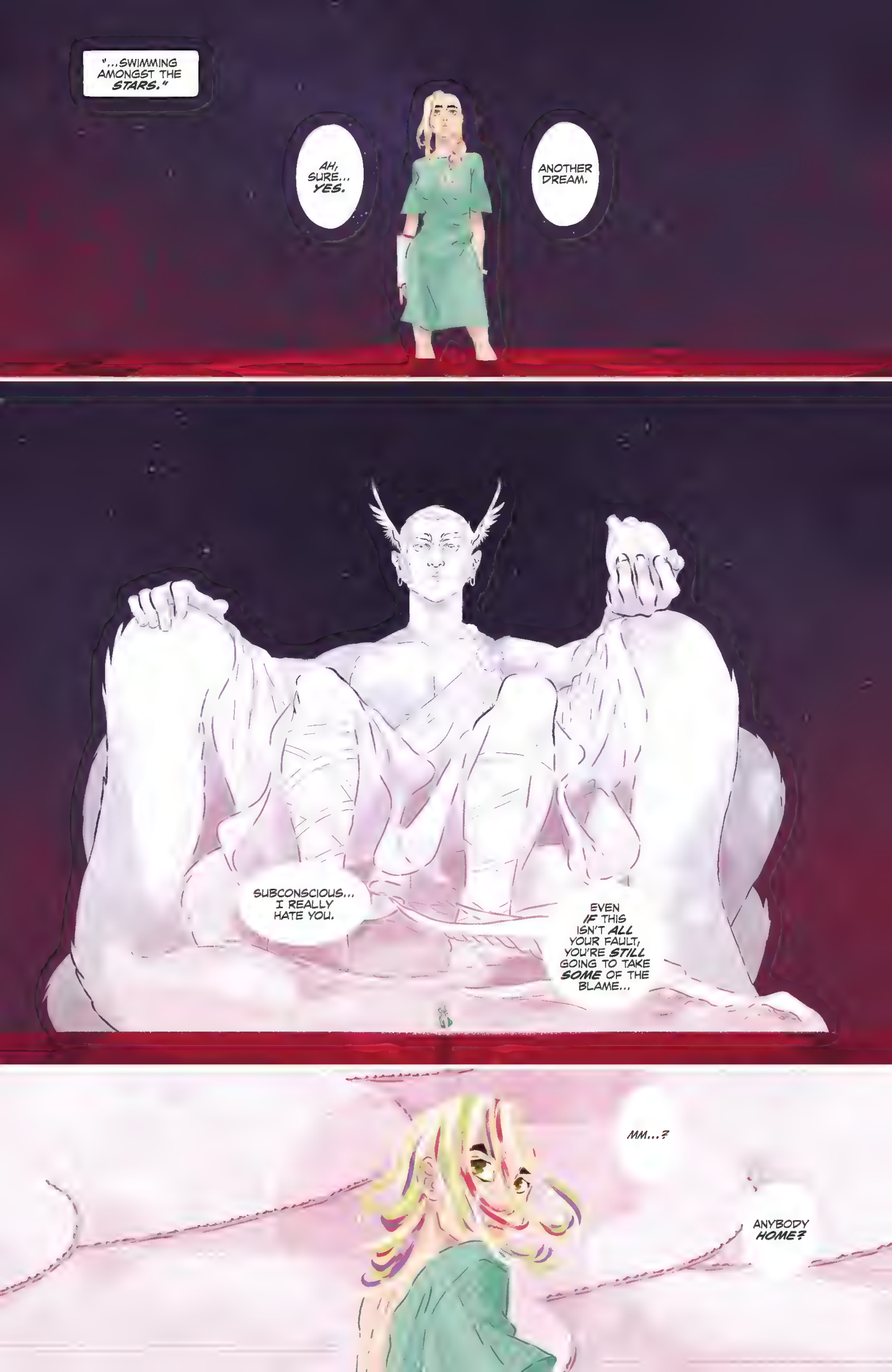

TIME ENOUGH TO *DIE!*

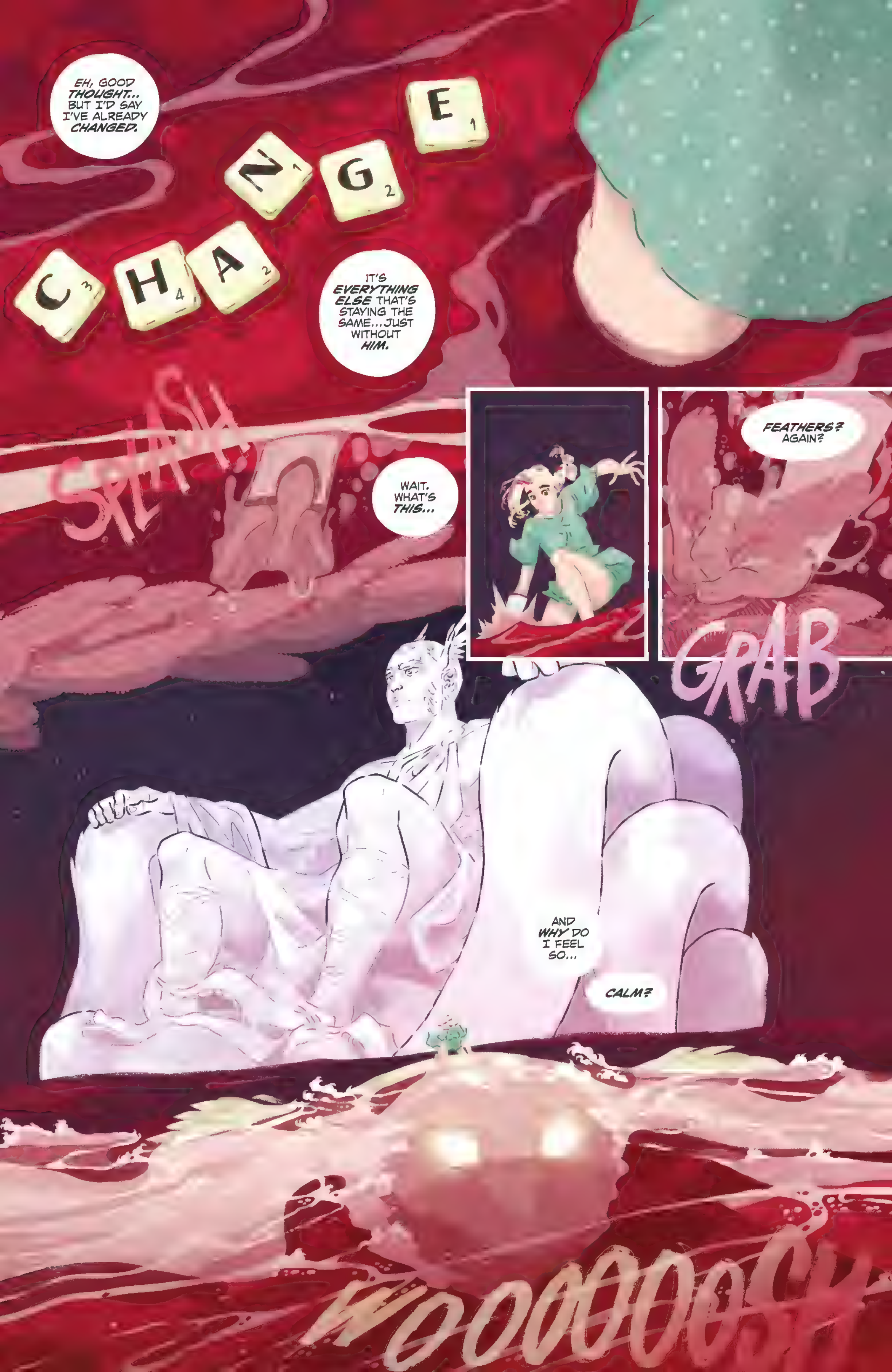
Chapter 3

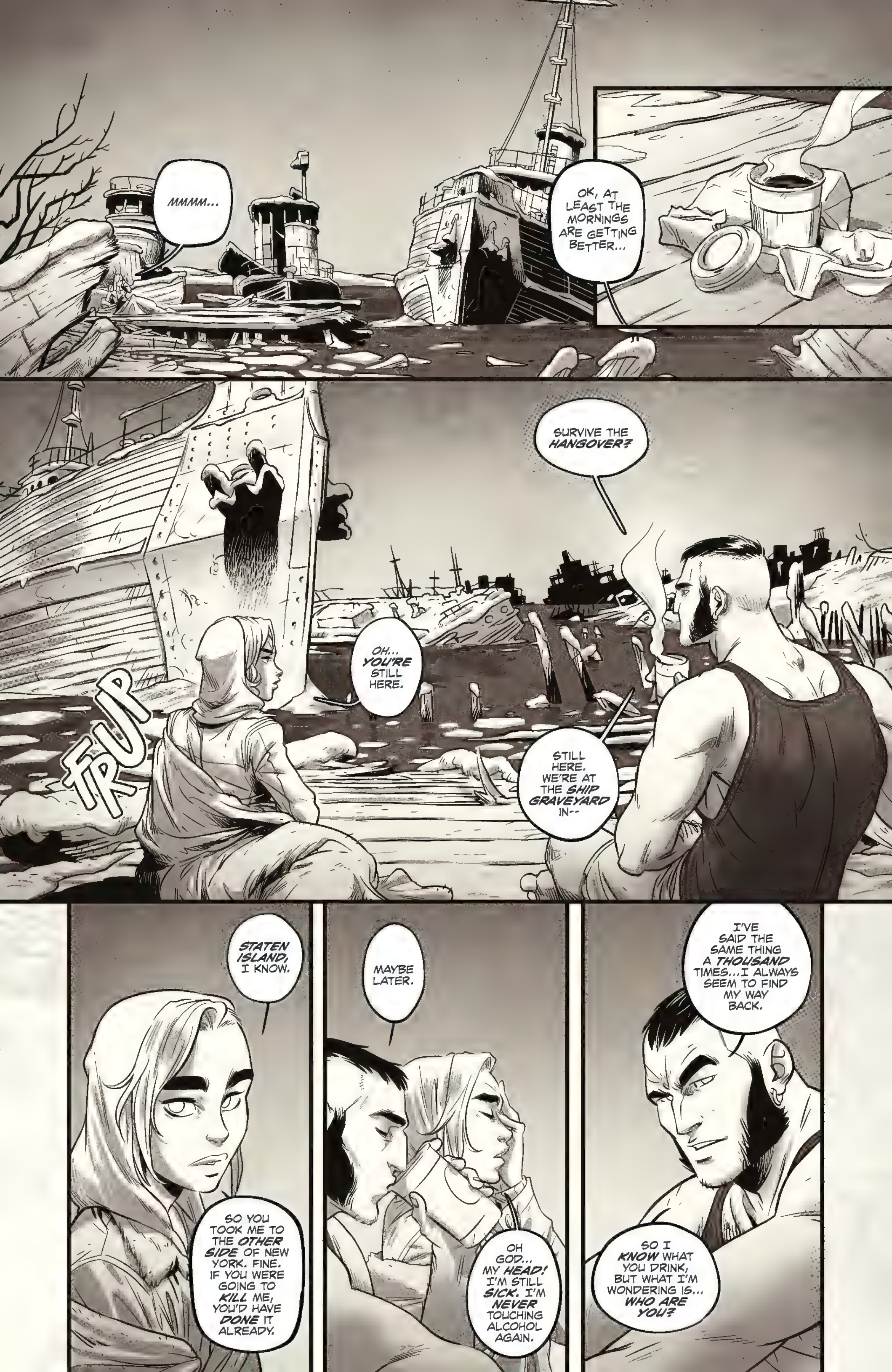

DO IT!
GIVE IN TO *THE WILD HUNT!*
I *FEEL* YOUR *FEAR,* DRUID...YOU *CANNOT* OVERCOME IT!
QUICK!
WE *MUST* HELP ONCHU... *NOW!*

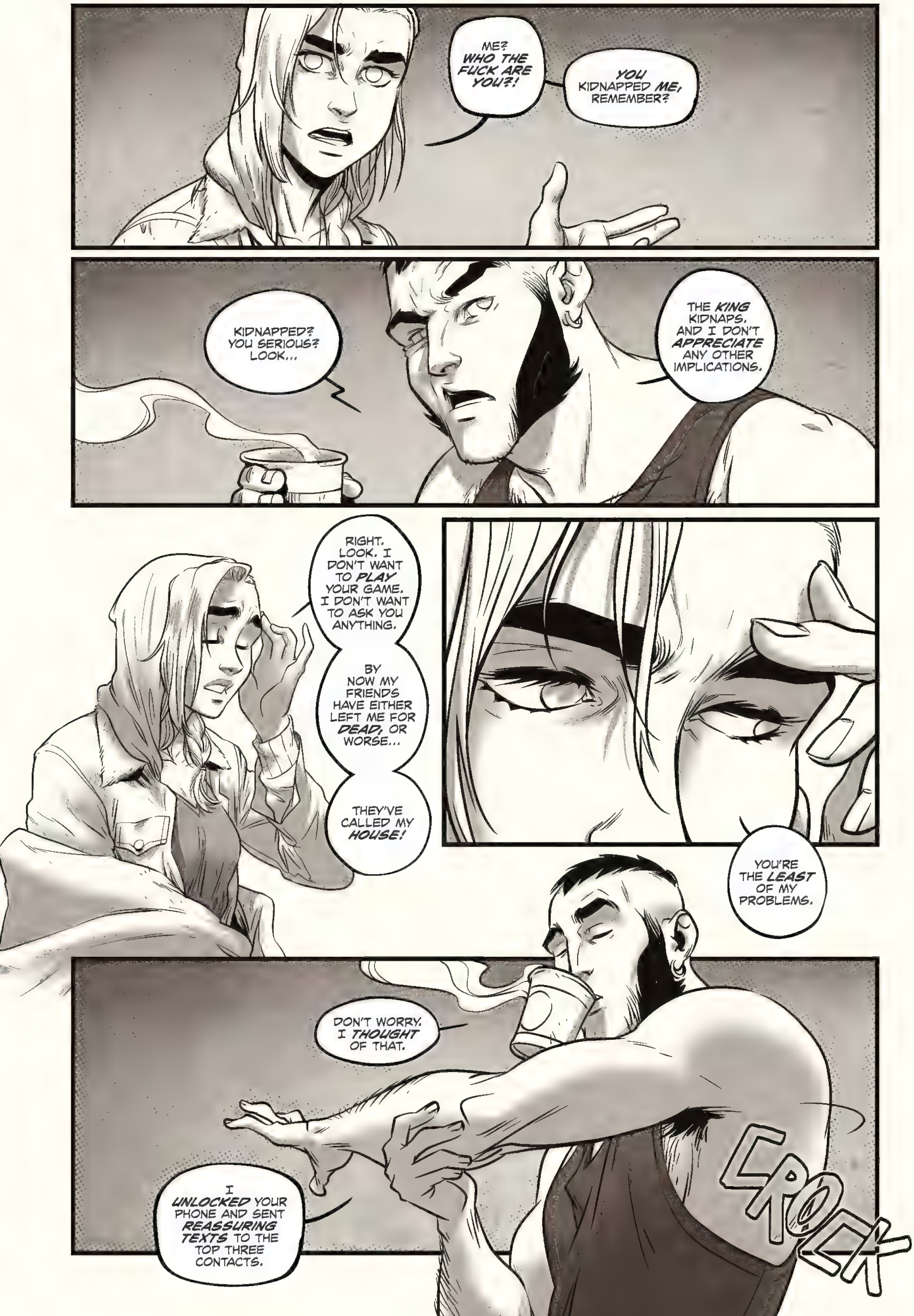

YOU'RE TELLING ME BECKY'S *GONE?* YOU JUST *LOST* HER?
I DIDN'T *LOSE* HER. SHE WAS ANGRY AND SHE STORMED OFF.
WE CAN'T JUST LEAVE HER! SHE'S YOUR *COUSIN!*
OH, SO IT'S *EASY* TO PUT THIS ALL ON *ME,* RIGHT?
WHAT ABOUT *YOU?* TOO BUSY GETTING *UNDRESSED* BY THAT PUERTO RICAN DUDE TO SEE WHERE SHE WENT?
TLACK
WAIT...
...THAT'S HER BAG.

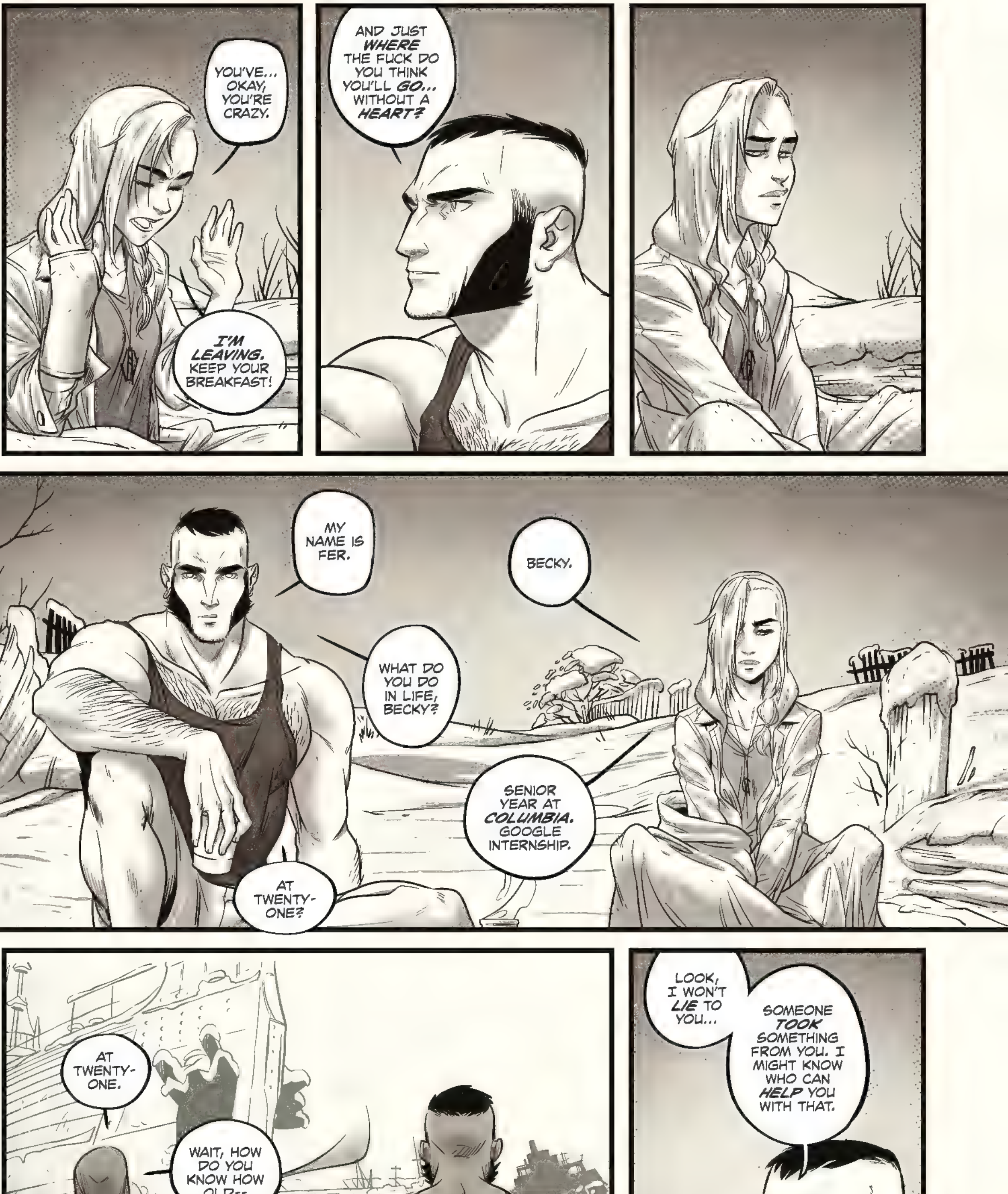

WHEN WE WERE CHILDREN, WE'D DRIVE HOME FROM THE POOL AND I'D LAY IN THE BACKSEAT.
I LOOKED UP AT THE CITY AND MADE BELIEVE IT WAS *UPSIDE DOWN.*
THE *EDGES* OF THE *ROOFS* BECAME *SIDEWALKS...*
AND THE *STARRY SKY* BECAME A *CANAL* DIVIDING PALACES, JUST LIKE IN *VENICE.*
I WANTED TO *FOLLOW* THOSE WATERS...SWIM *AWAY* FROM IT ALL.
BUT TO *WHERE?* I CAN'T REMEMBER.
MAYBE I JUST WANTED THE *JOURNEY* ITSELF...

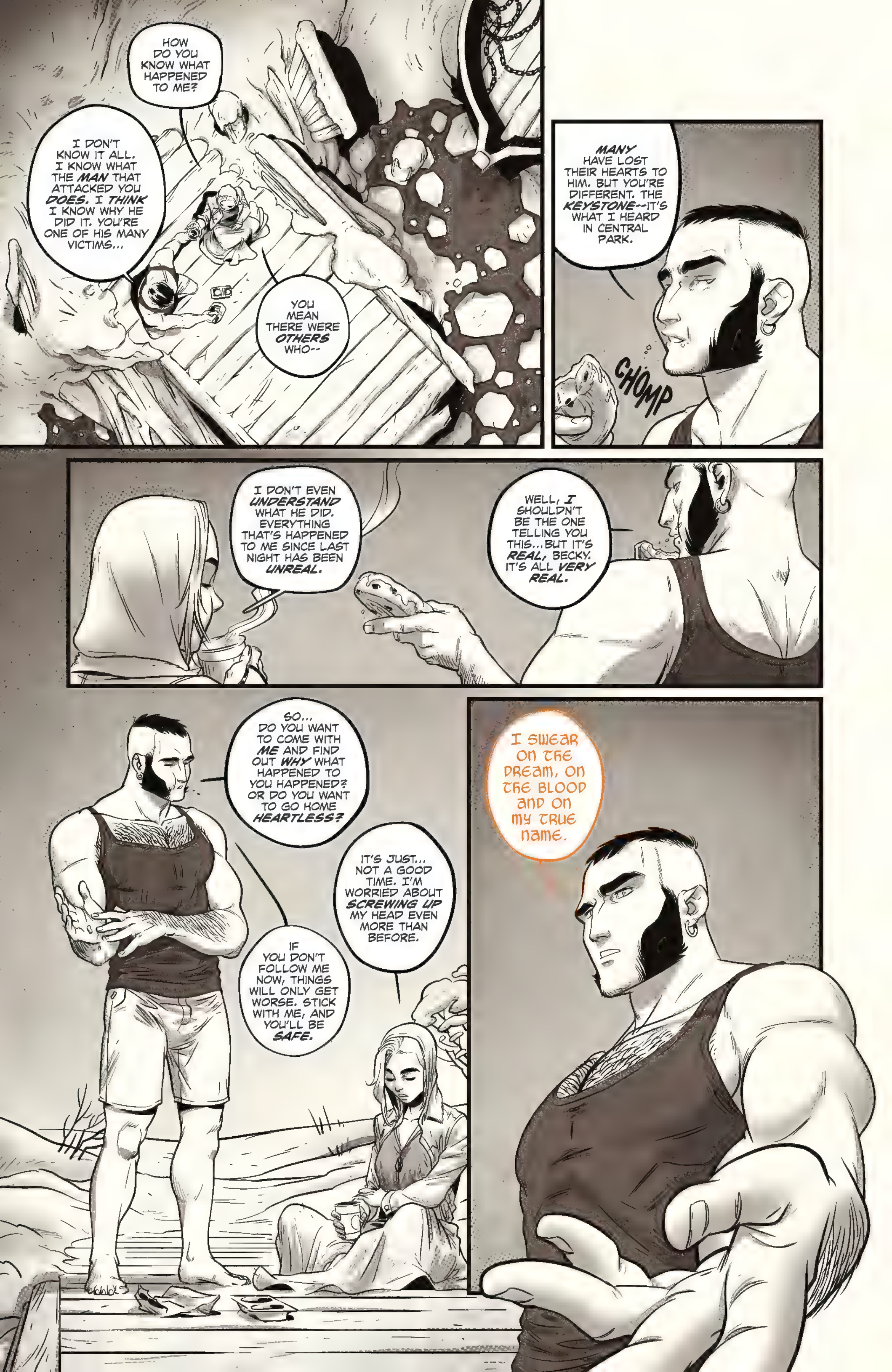

"...SWIMMING AMONGST THE *STARS.*"
AH, SURE... *YES.*
ANOTHER DREAM.
SUBCONSCIOUS... I REALLY HATE YOU.
EVEN *IF* THIS ISN'T *ALL* YOUR FAULT, YOU'RE *STILL* GOING TO TAKE *SOME* OF THE BLAME...
MM...?
ANYBODY *HOME?*

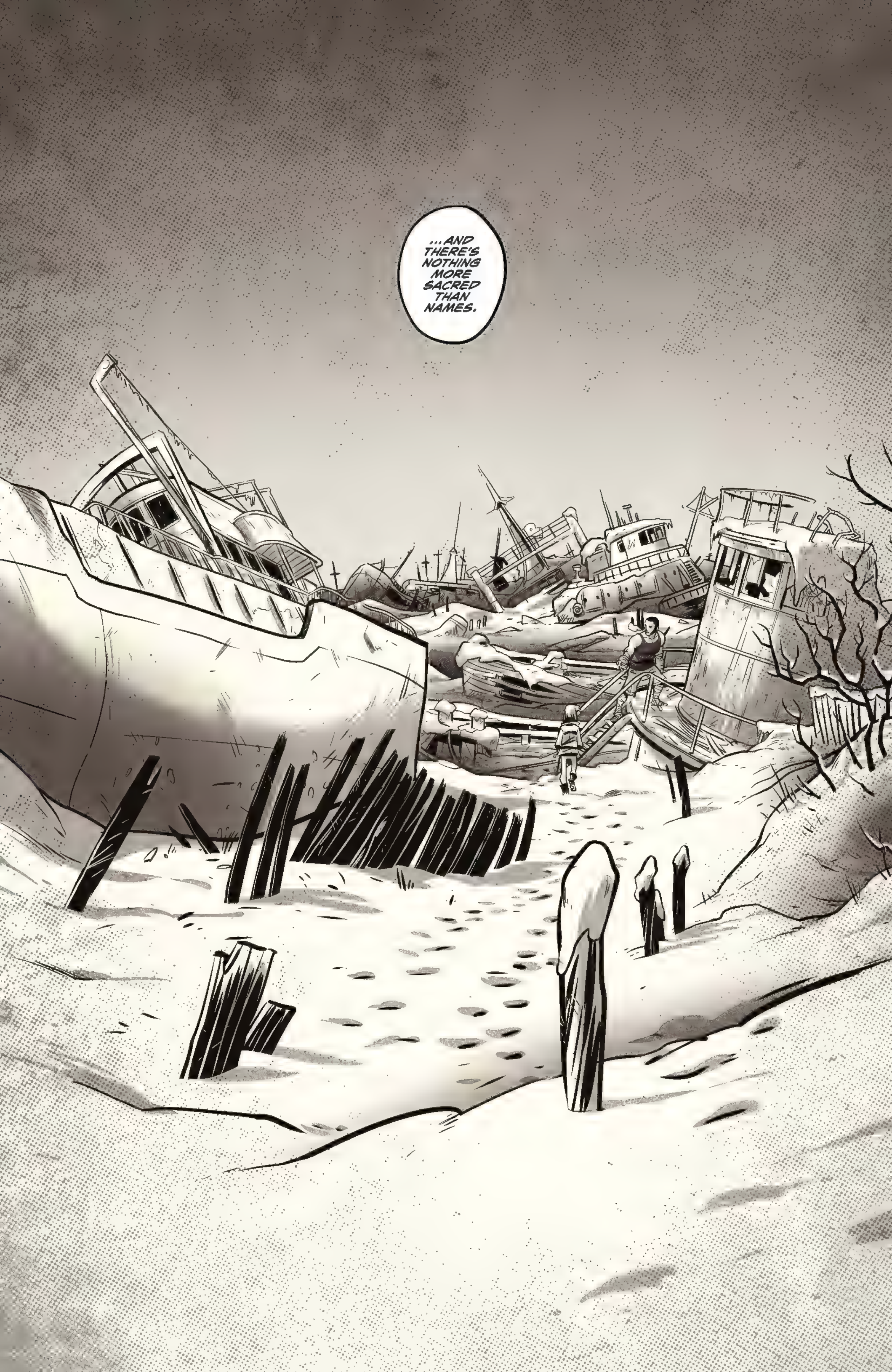

EH, GOOD *THOUGHT...* BUT I'D SAY I'VE ALREADY *CHANGED.*
E
CHANGE
IT'S *EVERYTHING ELSE* THAT'S STAYING THE SAME... JUST WITHOUT *HIM.*
SPLASH
WAIT. WHAT'S *THIS...*
FEATHERS? AGAIN?
GRAB
AND *WHY* DO I FEEL SO...
CALM?
WOOOOOOSH

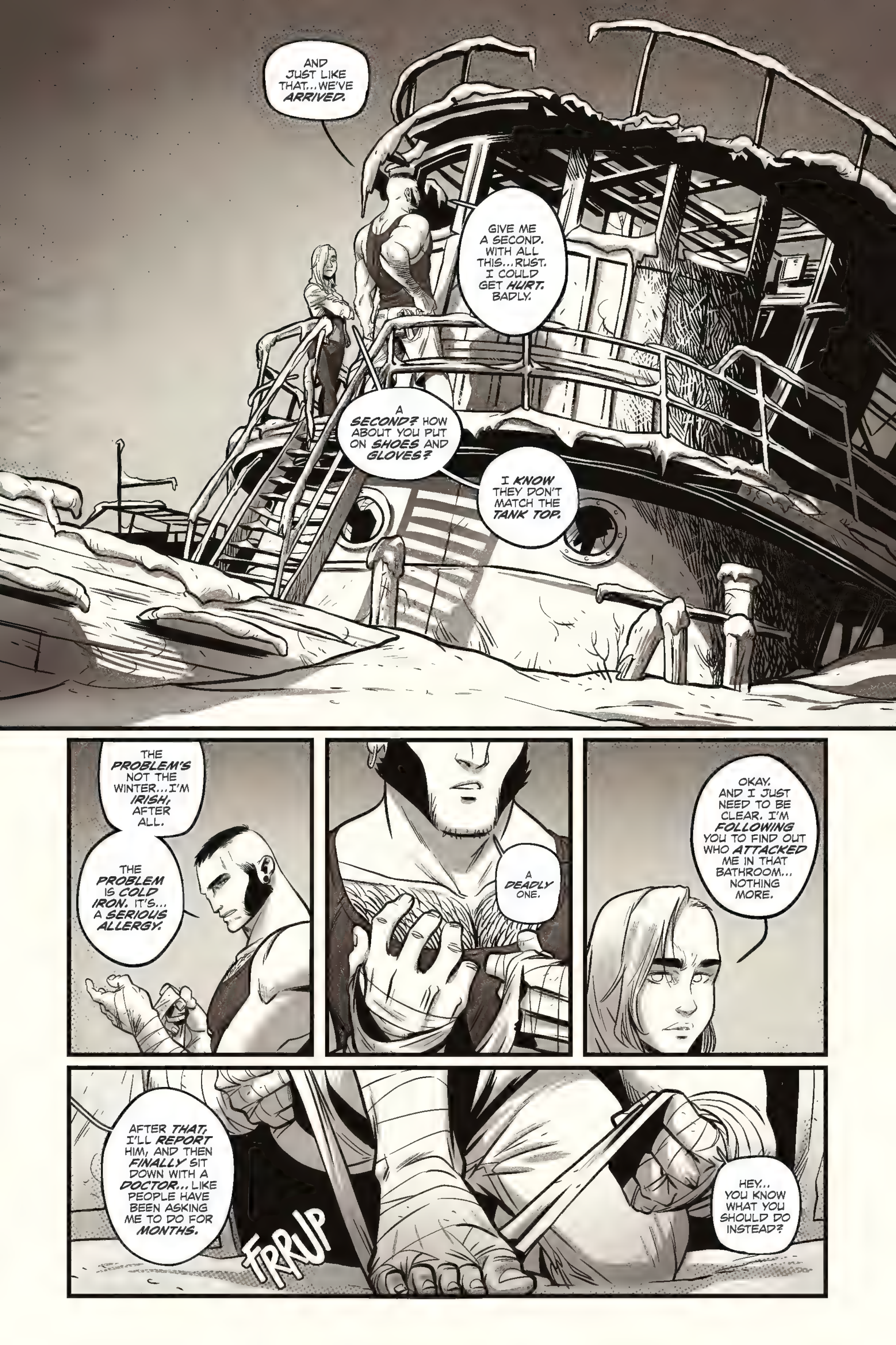

MMMM...
OK, AT LEAST THE MORNINGS ARE GETTING BETTER...
SURVIVE THE *HANGOVER?*
FRUP
OH... *YOU'RE* STILL HERE.
STILL HERE. WE'RE AT THE *SHIP GRAVEYARD* IN--
STATEN ISLAND, I KNOW.
SO YOU TOOK ME TO THE *OTHER SIDE* OF NEW YORK. FINE. IF YOU WERE GOING TO *KILL* ME, YOU'D HAVE *DONE* IT ALREADY.
MAYBE LATER.
OH GOD... MY *HEAD!* I'M STILL *SICK.* I'M *NEVER* TOUCHING ALCOHOL AGAIN.
I'VE SAID THE SAME THING A *THOUSAND* TIMES... I ALWAYS SEEM TO FIND MY WAY BACK.
SO I *KNOW* WHAT YOU DRINK, BUT WHAT I'M WONDERING IS... *WHO ARE YOU?*

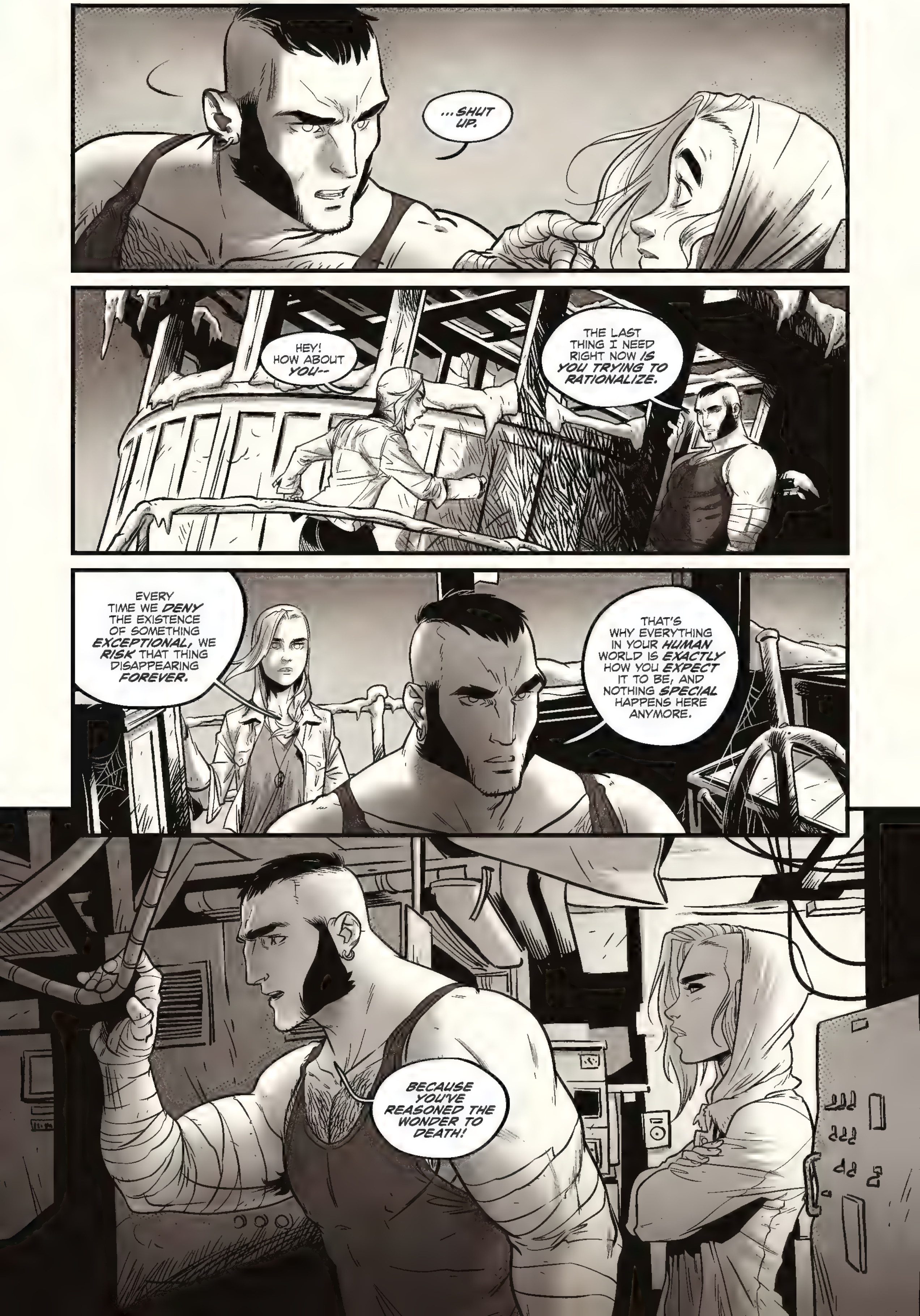

ME? *WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU?!*
YOU KIDNAPPED *ME,* REMEMBER?
KIDNAPPED? YOU SERIOUS? LOOK...
THE *KING* KIDNAPS. AND I DON'T *APPRECIATE* ANY OTHER IMPLICATIONS.
RIGHT. LOOK. I DON'T WANT TO *PLAY* YOUR GAME. I DON'T WANT TO ASK YOU ANYTHING.
BY NOW MY FRIENDS HAVE EITHER LEFT ME FOR *DEAD,* OR WORSE...
THEY'VE CALLED MY *HOUSE!*
YOU'RE THE *LEAST* OF MY PROBLEMS.
DON'T WORRY. I *THOUGHT* OF THAT.
I *UNLOCKED* YOUR PHONE AND SENT *REASSURING TEXTS* TO THE TOP THREE CONTACTS.
CROCK

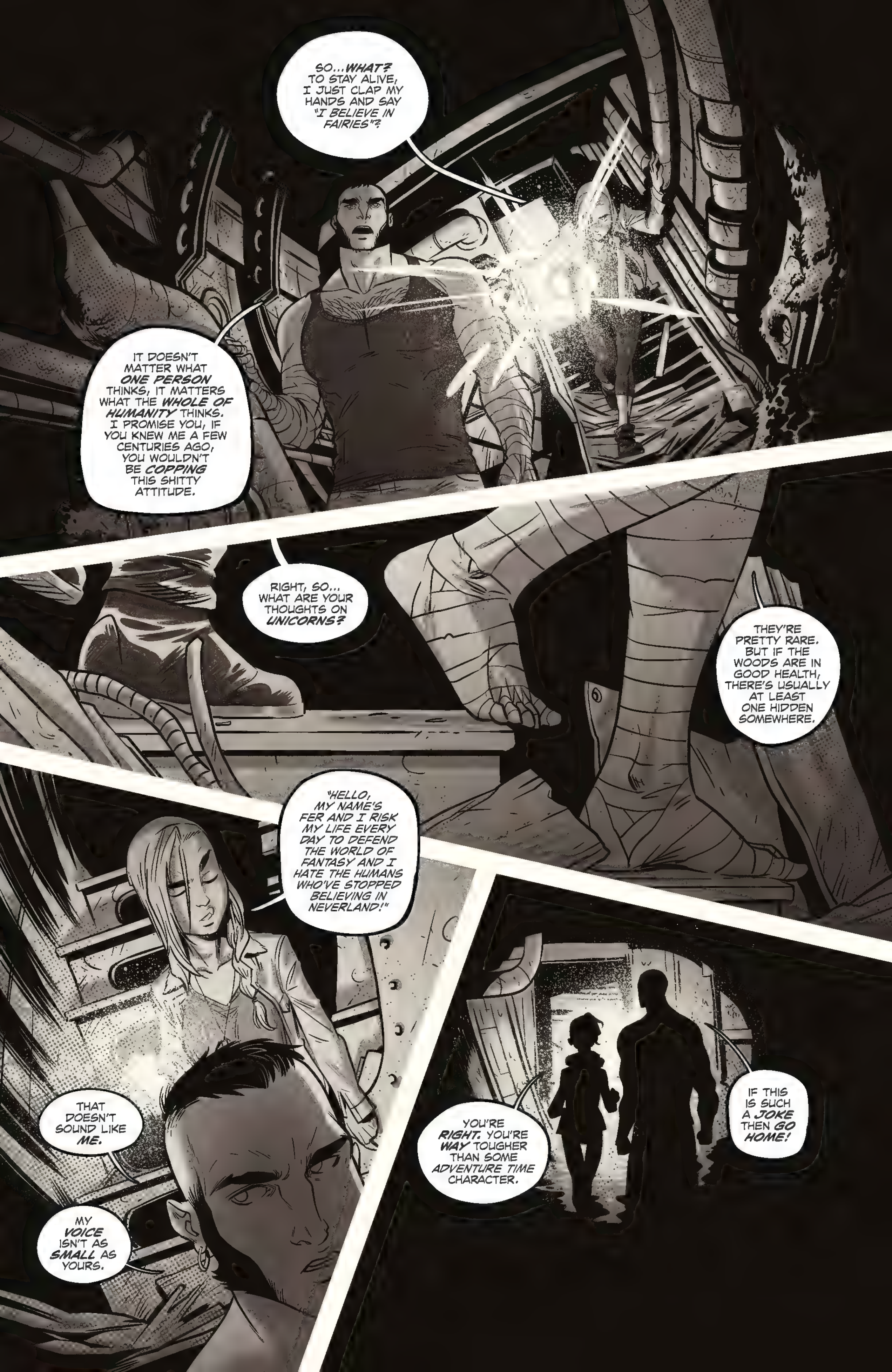

YOU'VE... OKAY, YOU'RE CRAZY.
I'M LEAVING. KEEP YOUR BREAKFAST!
AND JUST *WHERE* THE FUCK DO YOU THINK YOU'LL *GO...* WITHOUT A *HEART?*
MY NAME IS FER.
BECKY.
WHAT DO YOU DO IN LIFE, BECKY?
SENIOR YEAR AT *COLUMBIA.* GOOGLE INTERNSHIP.
AT TWENTY-ONE?
AT TWENTY-ONE.
WAIT, HOW DO YOU KNOW HOW OLD--
FROM THE *SMELL.*
LOOK, I WON'T *LIE* TO YOU...
SOMEONE *TOOK* SOMETHING FROM YOU. I MIGHT KNOW WHO CAN *HELP* YOU WITH THAT.

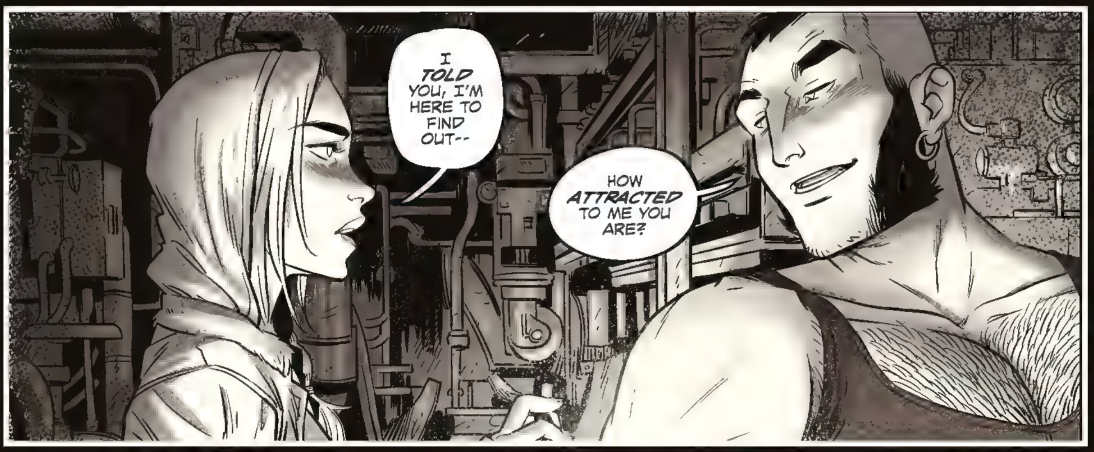

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?
I DON'T KNOW IT ALL. I KNOW WHAT THE MAN THAT ATTACKED YOU DOES. I THINK I KNOW WHY HE DID IT. YOU'RE ONE OF HIS MANY VICTIMS...
YOU MEAN THERE WERE OTHERS WHO--
MANY HAVE LOST THEIR HEARTS TO HIM. BUT YOU'RE DIFFERENT. THE KEYSTONE--IT'S WHAT I HEARD IN CENTRAL PARK.
CHOMP
I DON'T EVEN UNDERSTAND WHAT HE DID. EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED TO ME SINCE LAST NIGHT HAS BEEN UNREAL.
WELL, I SHOULDN'T BE THE ONE TELLING YOU THIS...BUT IT'S REAL, BECKY. IT'S ALL VERY REAL.
SO... DO YOU WANT TO COME WITH ME AND FIND OUT WHY WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU HAPPENED? OR DO YOU WANT TO GO HOME HEARTLESS?
IT'S JUST... NOT A GOOD TIME. I'M WORRIED ABOUT SCREWING UP MY HEAD EVEN MORE THAN BEFORE.
IF YOU DON'T FOLLOW ME NOW, THINGS WILL ONLY GET WORSE. STICK WITH ME, AND YOU'LL BE SAFE.
I SWEAR ON THE DREAM, ON THE BLOOD AND ON MY TRUE NAME.

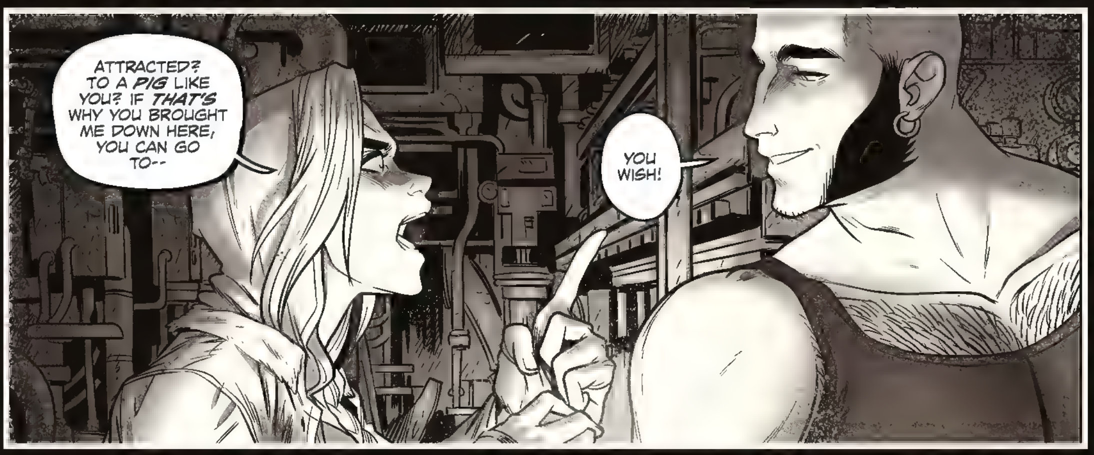

...AND THERE'S NOTHING MORE SACRED THAN NAMES.

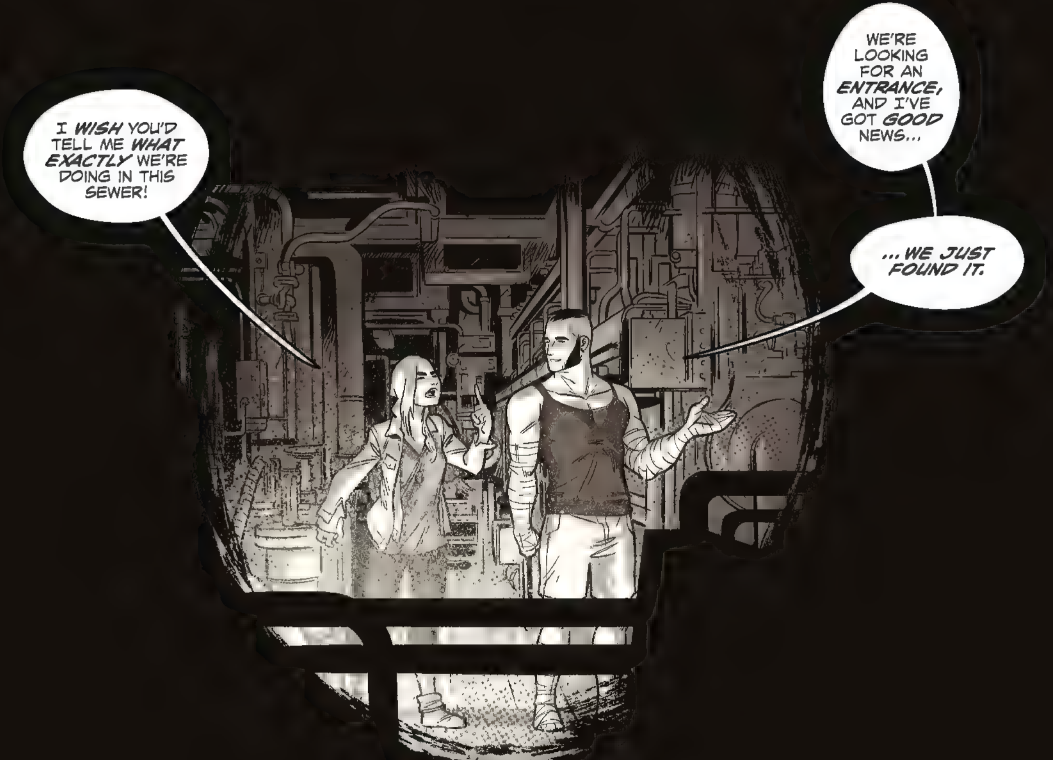

AND JUST LIKE THAT... WE'VE *ARRIVED.*
GIVE ME A SECOND. WITH ALL THIS... RUST. I COULD GET *HURT.* BADLY.
A *SECOND?* HOW ABOUT YOU PUT ON *SHOES* AND *GLOVES?*
I *KNOW* THEY DON'T MATCH THE *TANK TOP.*
THE *PROBLEM'S* NOT THE WINTER... I'M *IRISH,* AFTER ALL.
THE *PROBLEM* IS *COLD IRON.* IT'S... A *SERIOUS ALLERGY.*
A *DEADLY* ONE.
OKAY. AND I JUST NEED TO BE CLEAR. I'M *FOLLOWING* YOU TO FIND OUT WHO *ATTACKED* ME IN THAT BATHROOM... NOTHING MORE.
AFTER *THAT,* I'LL *REPORT* HIM, AND THEN *FINALLY* SIT DOWN WITH A *DOCTOR...* LIKE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ASKING ME TO DO FOR *MONTHS.*
FRRUP
HEY... YOU KNOW WHAT YOU SHOULD DO INSTEAD?

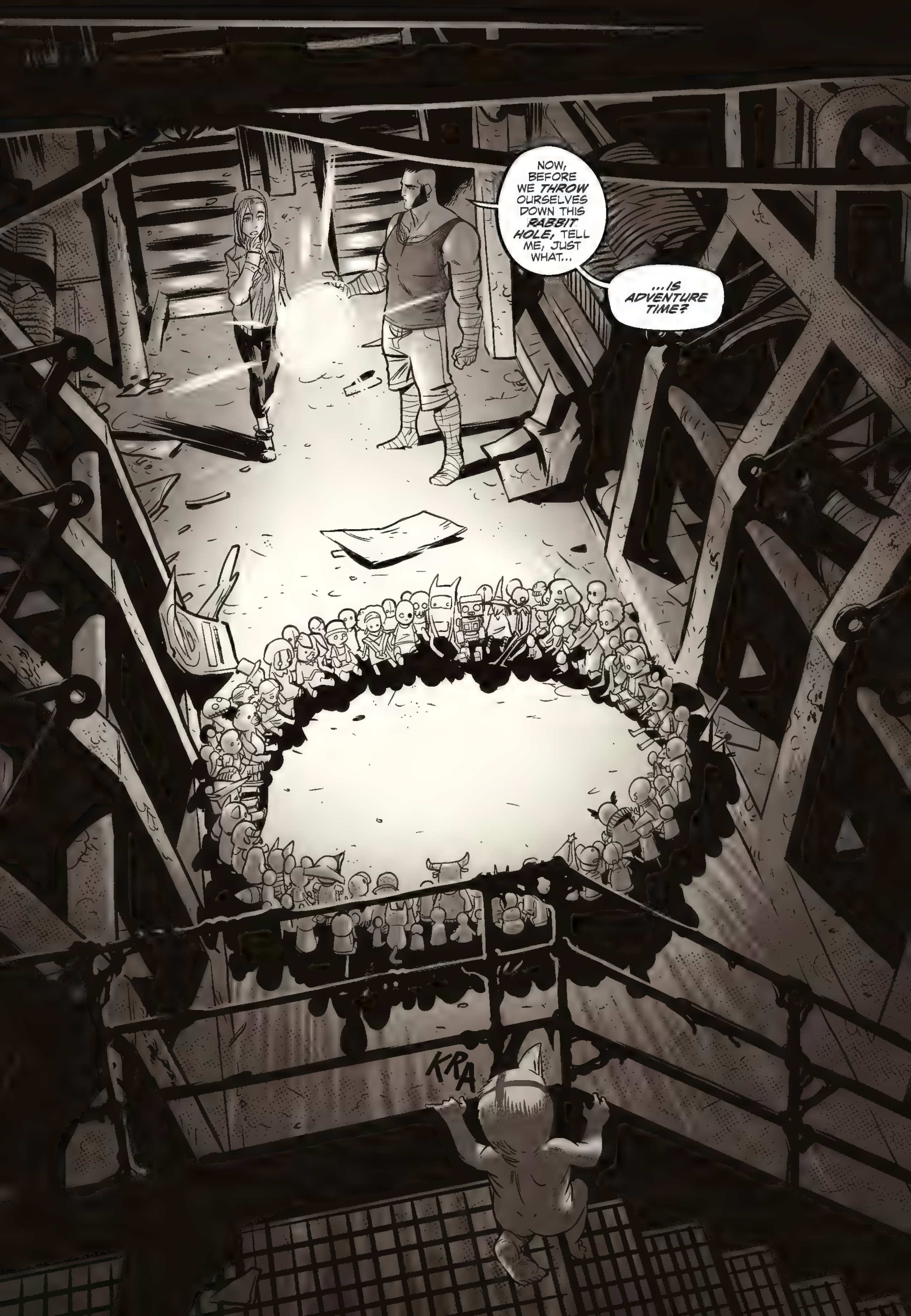

...SHUT UP.
HEY! HOW ABOUT YOU--
THE LAST THING I NEED RIGHT NOW IS YOU TRYING TO RATIONALIZE.
EVERY TIME WE DENY THE EXISTENCE OF SOMETHING EXCEPTIONAL, WE RISK THAT THING DISAPPEARING FOREVER.
THAT'S WHY EVERYTHING IN YOUR HUMAN WORLD IS EXACTLY HOW YOU EXPECT IT TO BE, AND NOTHING SPECIAL HAPPENS HERE ANYMORE.
BECAUSE YOU'VE REASONED THE WONDER TO DEATH!

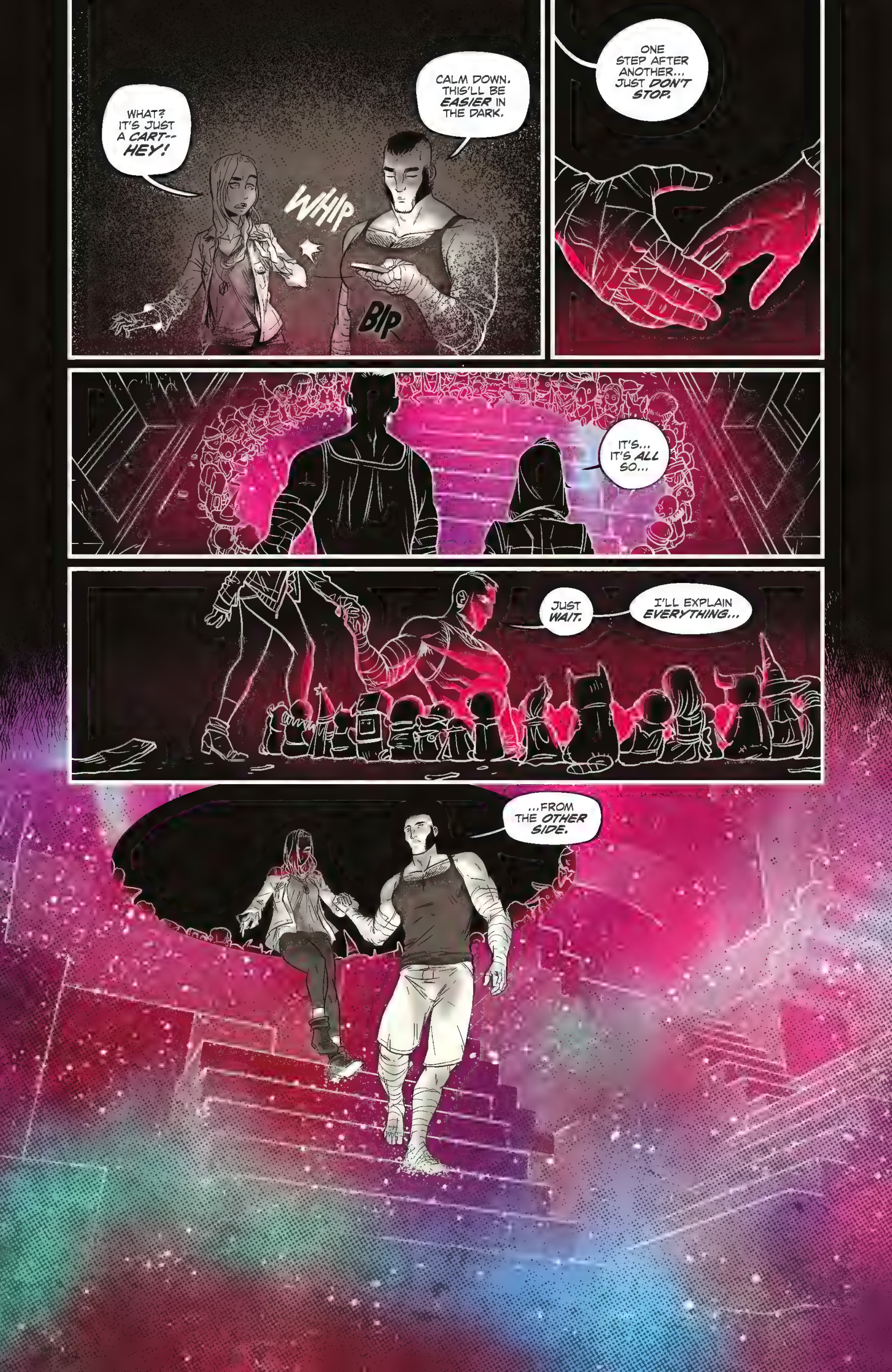

SO...WHAT? TO STAY ALIVE, I JUST CLAP MY HANDS AND SAY "I BELIEVE IN FAIRIES"?
IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT ONE PERSON THINKS, IT MATTERS WHAT THE WHOLE OF HUMANITY THINKS. I PROMISE YOU, IF YOU KNEW ME A FEW CENTURIES AGO, YOU WOULDN'T BE COPPING THIS SHITTY ATTITUDE.
RIGHT, SO... WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON UNICORNS?
THEY'RE PRETTY RARE. BUT IF THE WOODS ARE IN GOOD HEALTH, THERE'S USUALLY AT LEAST ONE HIDDEN SOMEWHERE.
"HELLO, MY NAME'S FER AND I RISK MY LIFE EVERY DAY TO DEFEND THE WORLD OF FANTASY AND I HATE THE HUMANS WHO'VE STOPPED BELIEVING IN NEVERLAND!"
THAT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE ME.
MY VOICE ISN'T AS SMALL AS YOURS.
IF THIS IS SUCH A JOKE THEN GO HOME!
YOU'RE RIGHT. YOU'RE WAY TOUGHER THAN SOME ADVENTURE TIME CHARACTER.

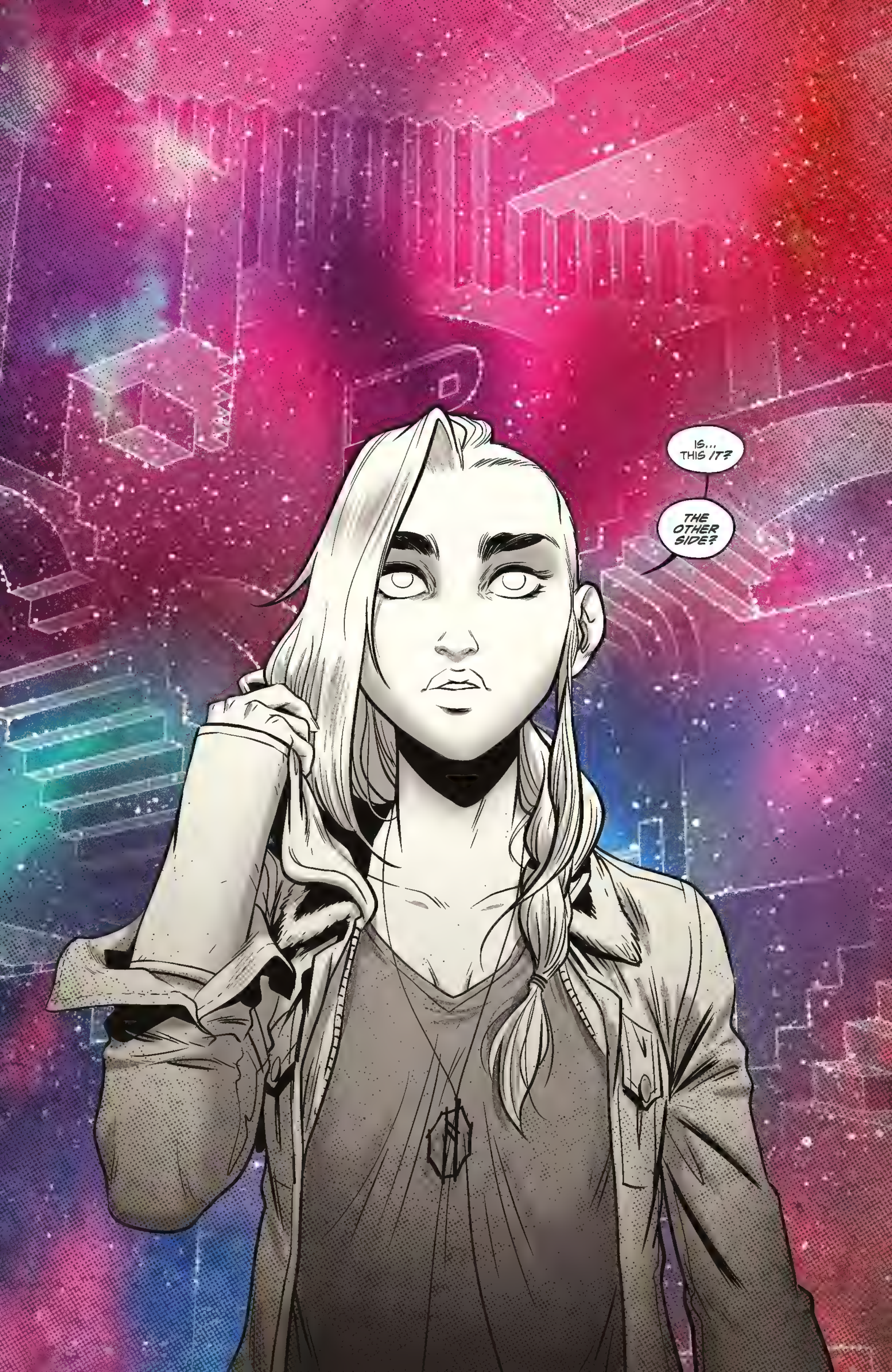

I *TOLD* YOU, I'M HERE TO FIND OUT--
HOW *ATTRACTED* TO ME YOU ARE?

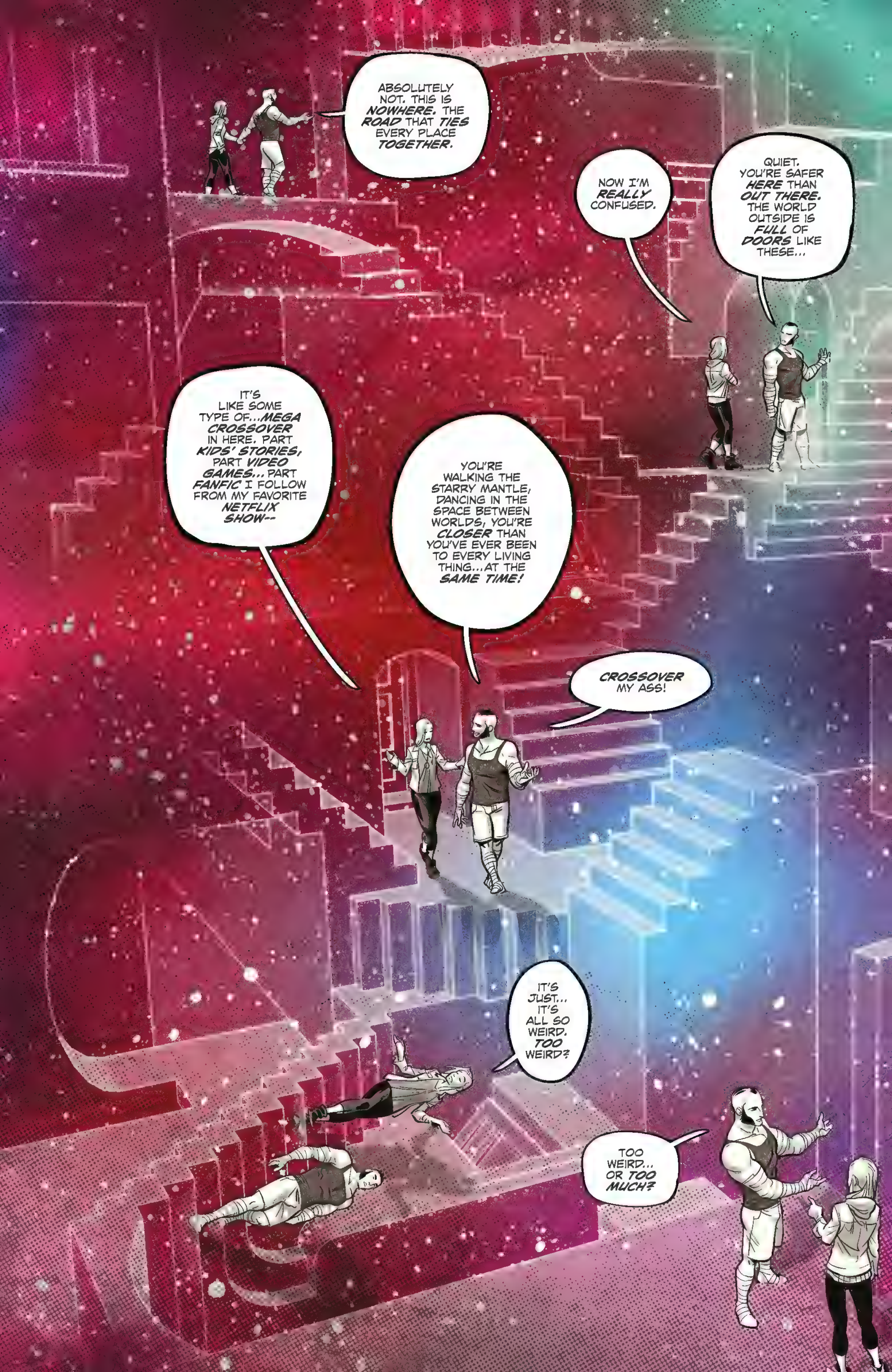

ATTRACTED? TO A *PIG* LIKE YOU? IF *THAT'S* WHY YOU BROUGHT ME DOWN HERE, YOU CAN GO TO--
YOU WISH!

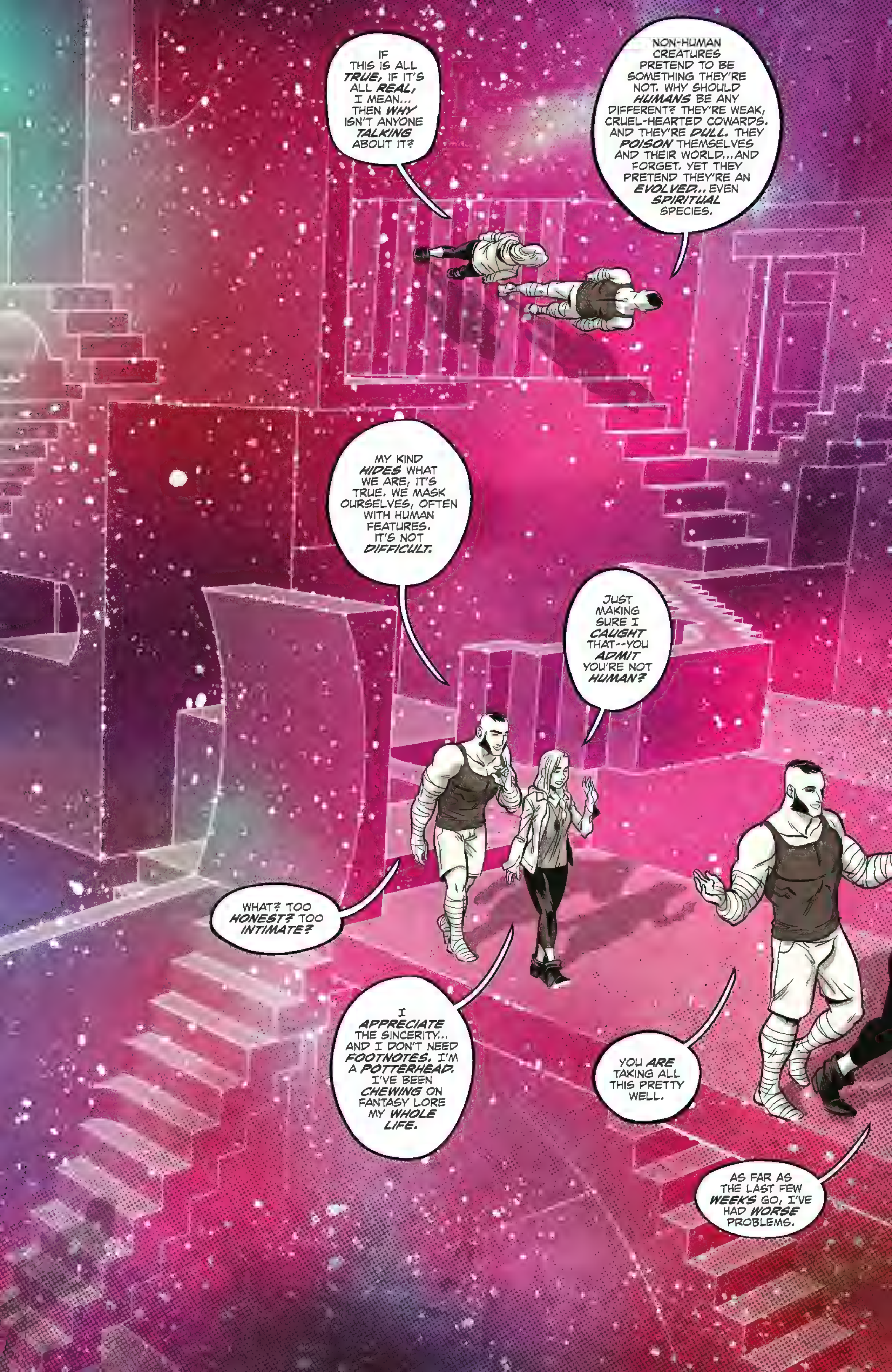

I *WISH* YOU'D TELL ME *WHAT EXACTLY* WE'RE DOING IN THIS SEWER!
WE'RE LOOKING FOR AN *ENTRANCE,* AND I'VE GOT *GOOD* NEWS...
...WE JUST FOUND IT.

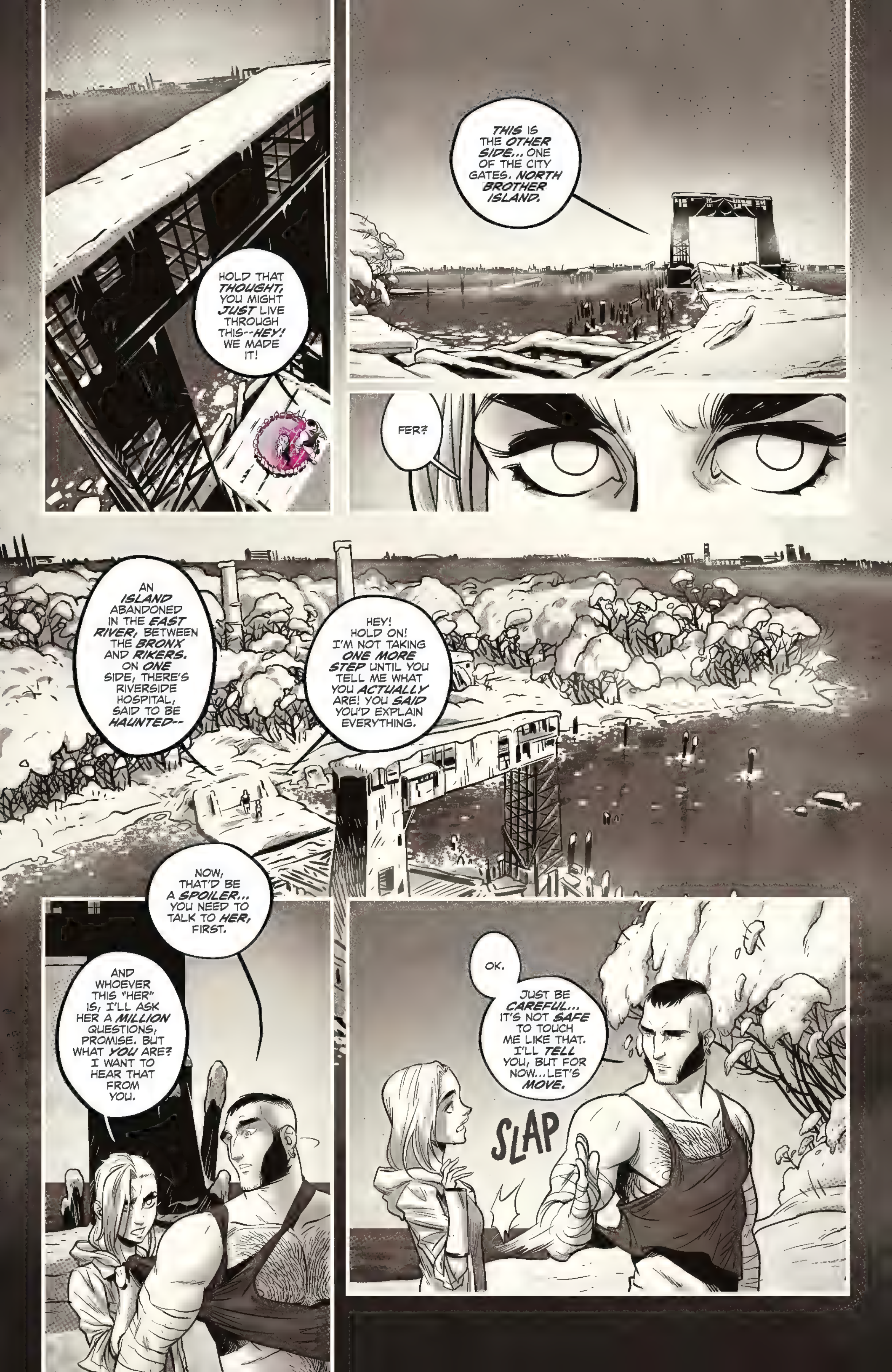

NOW, BEFORE WE *THROW* OURSELVES DOWN THIS *RABBIT HOLE,* TELL ME, JUST WHAT...
...IS ADVENTURE TIME?
KRA

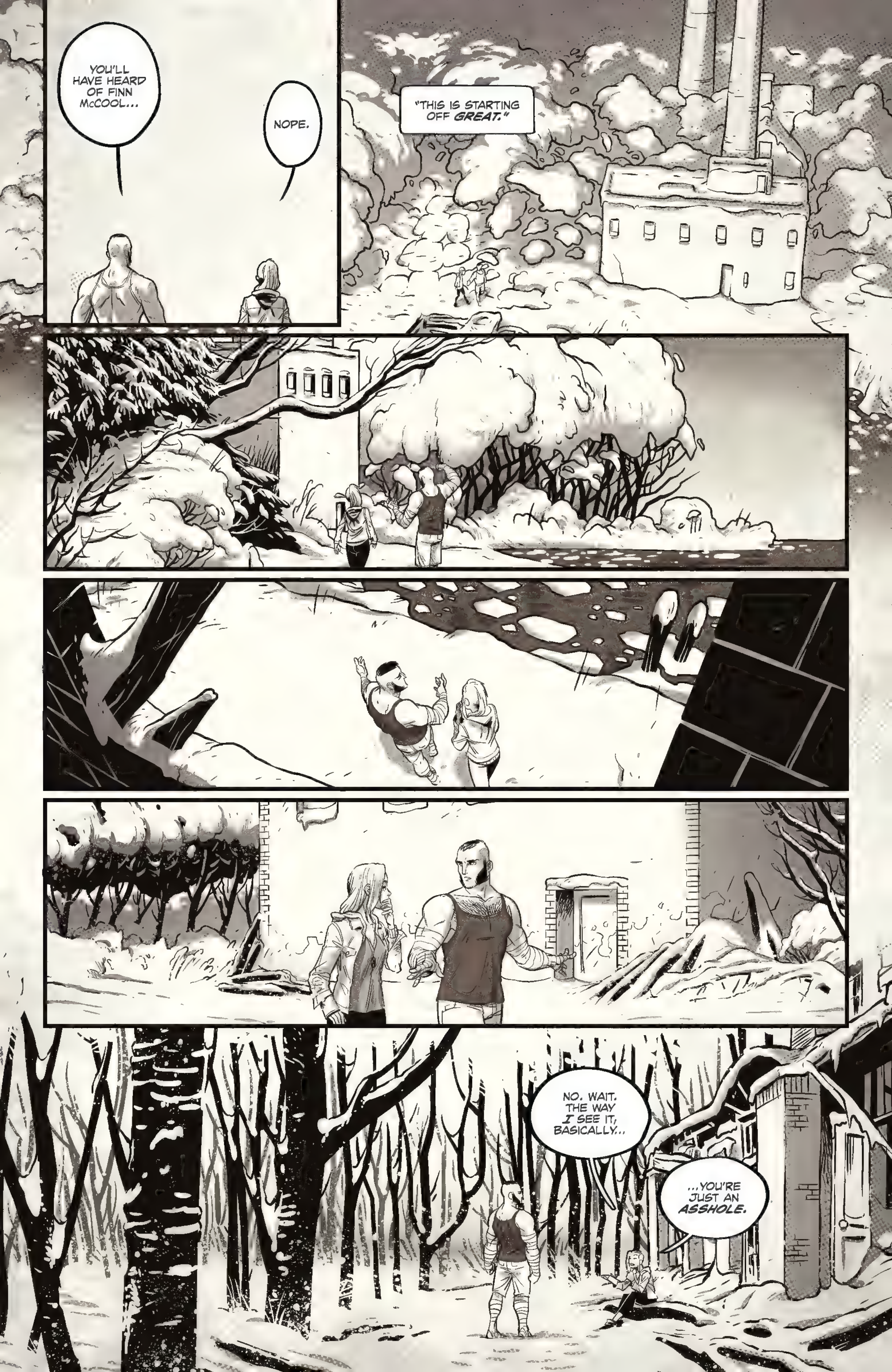

WHAT? IT'S JUST A *CART*-- *HEY!*
CALM DOWN. THIS'LL BE *EASIER* IN THE DARK.
WHIP
BIP
ONE STEP AFTER ANOTHER... JUST *DON'T STOP.*
IT'S... IT'S *ALL* SO...
JUST *WAIT.*
I'LL EXPLAIN *EVERYTHING...*
...FROM THE *OTHER SIDE.*

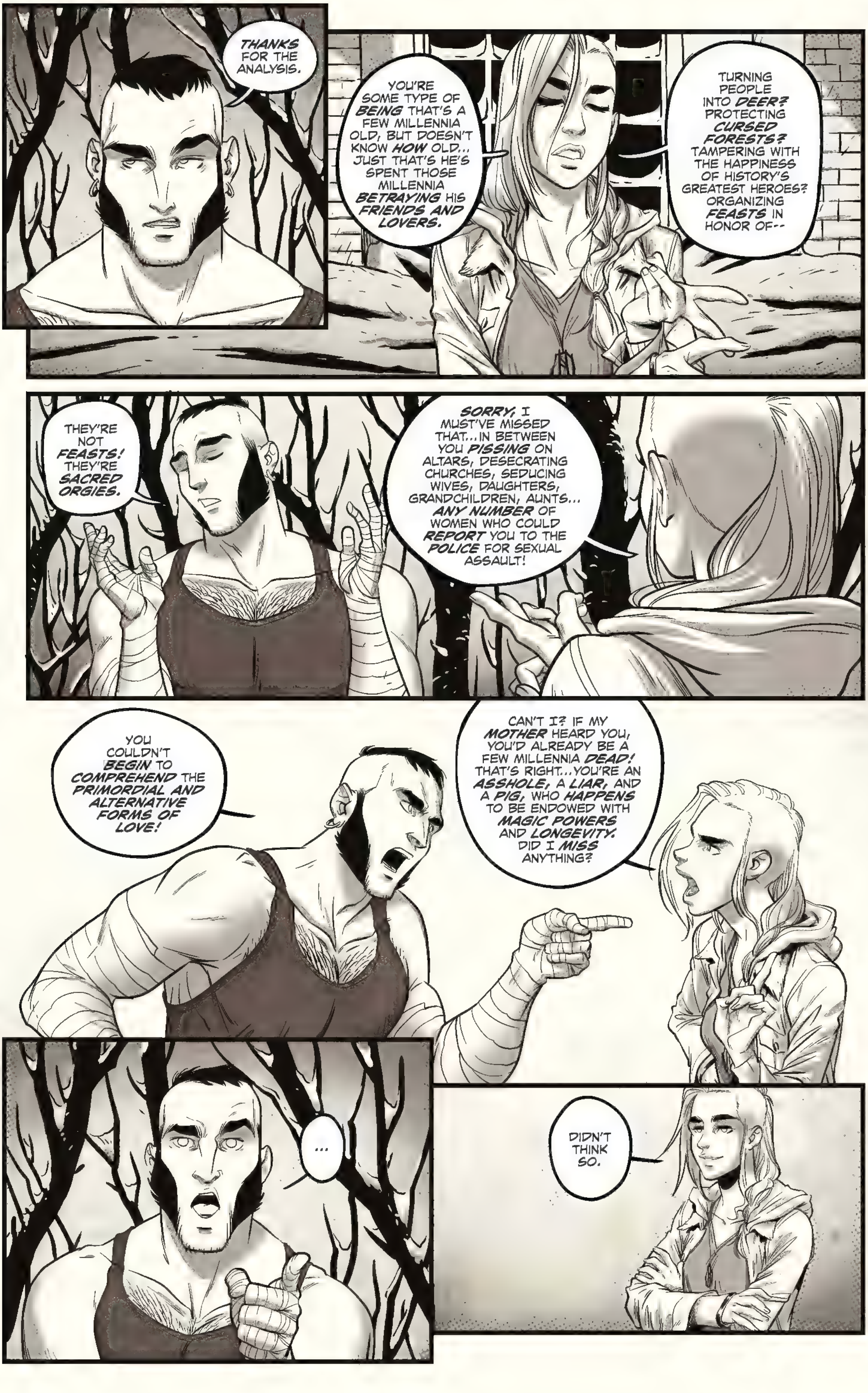

IS... THIS *IT?*
THE OTHER SIDE?

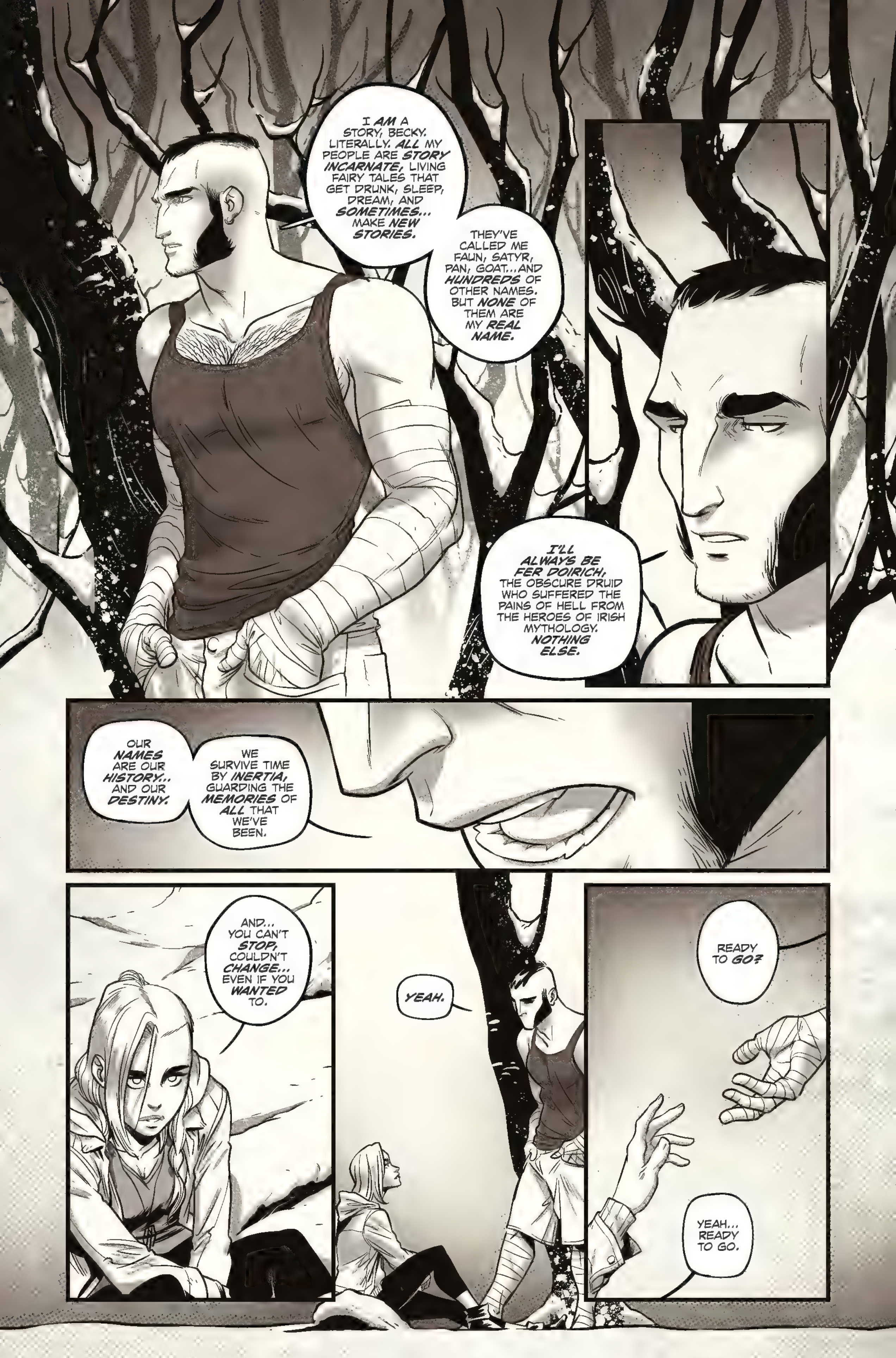

ABSOLUTELY NOT. THIS IS *NOWHERE*. THE *ROAD* THAT *TIES* EVERY PLACE *TOGETHER*.
NOW I'M *REALLY* CONFUSED.
QUIET. YOU'RE SAFER *HERE* THAN *OUT THERE*. THE WORLD OUTSIDE IS *FULL* OF *DOORS* LIKE THESE...
IT'S LIKE SOME TYPE OF...*MEGA CROSSOVER* IN HERE. PART *KIDS' STORIES*, PART *VIDEO GAMES*... PART *FANFIC* I FOLLOW FROM MY FAVORITE *NETFLIX SHOW*--
YOU'RE WALKING THE STARRY MANTLE, DANCING IN THE SPACE BETWEEN WORLDS, YOU'RE *CLOSER* THAN YOU'VE EVER BEEN TO EVERY LIVING THING...AT THE *SAME TIME!*
CROSSOVER MY ASS!
IT'S JUST... IT'S ALL SO WEIRD. *TOO* WEIRD?
TOO WEIRD... OR *TOO MUCH?*

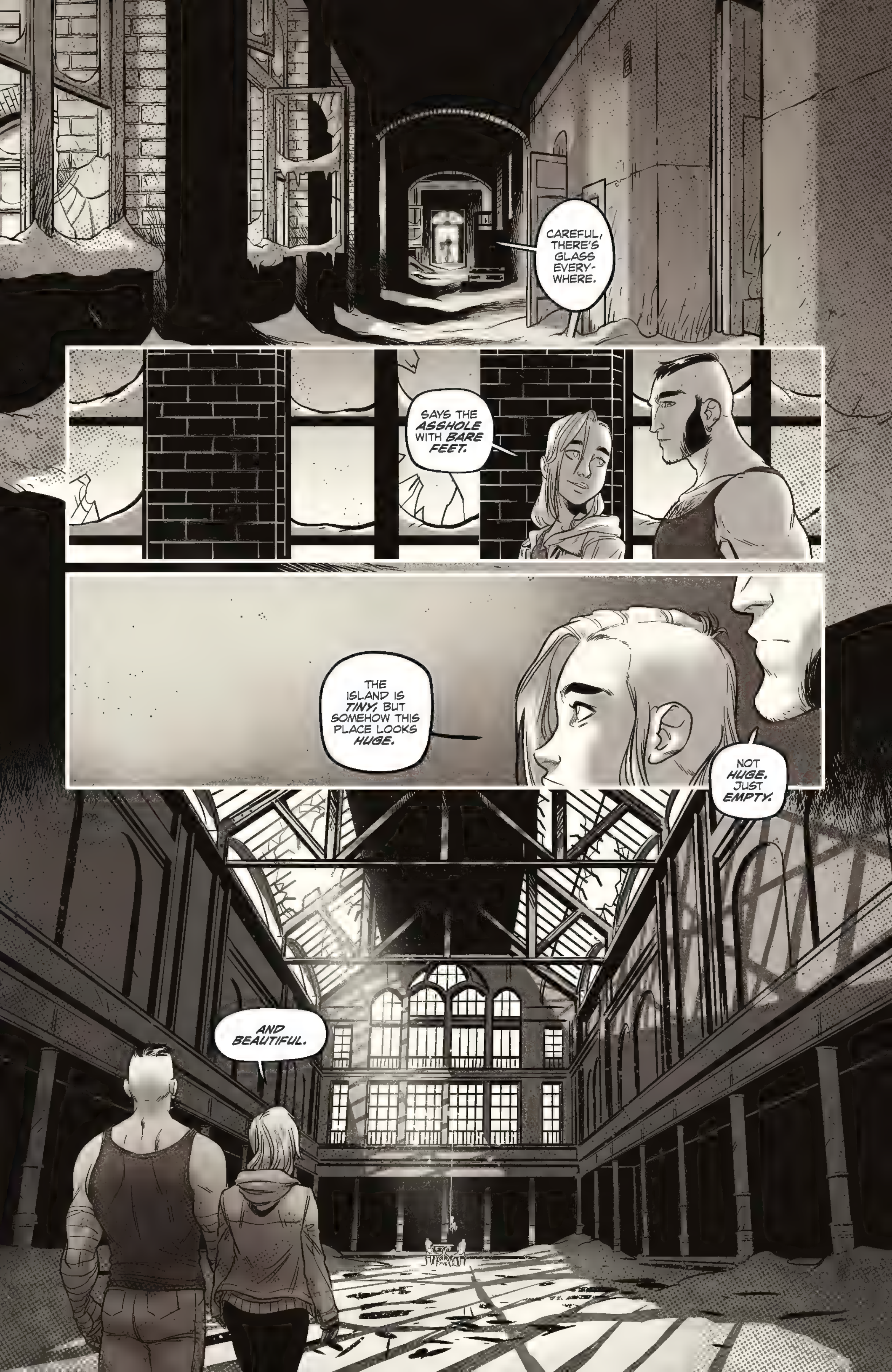

IF THIS IS ALL *TRUE,* IF IT'S ALL *REAL,* I MEAN... THEN *WHY* ISN'T ANYONE *TALKING* ABOUT IT?
NON-HUMAN CREATURES PRETEND TO BE SOMETHING THEY'RE NOT. WHY SHOULD *HUMANS* BE ANY DIFFERENT? THEY'RE WEAK, CRUEL-HEARTED COWARDS. AND THEY'RE *DULL.* THEY *POISON* THEMSELVES AND THEIR WORLD...AND FORGET. YET THEY PRETEND THEY'RE AN *EVOLVED...* EVEN *SPIRITUAL* SPECIES.
MY KIND *HIDES* WHAT WE ARE, IT'S TRUE. WE MASK OURSELVES, OFTEN WITH HUMAN FEATURES. IT'S NOT *DIFFICULT.*
JUST MAKING SURE I *CAUGHT* THAT--YOU *ADMIT* YOU'RE NOT *HUMAN?*
WHAT? TOO *HONEST?* TOO *INTIMATE?*
I *APPRECIATE* THE SINCERITY... AND I DON'T NEED *FOOTNOTES.* I'M A *POTTERHEAD.* I'VE BEEN *CHEWING* ON FANTASY LORE MY *WHOLE LIFE.*
YOU *ARE* TAKING ALL THIS PRETTY WELL.
AS FAR AS THE LAST FEW *WEEKS* GO, I'VE HAD *WORSE* PROBLEMS.

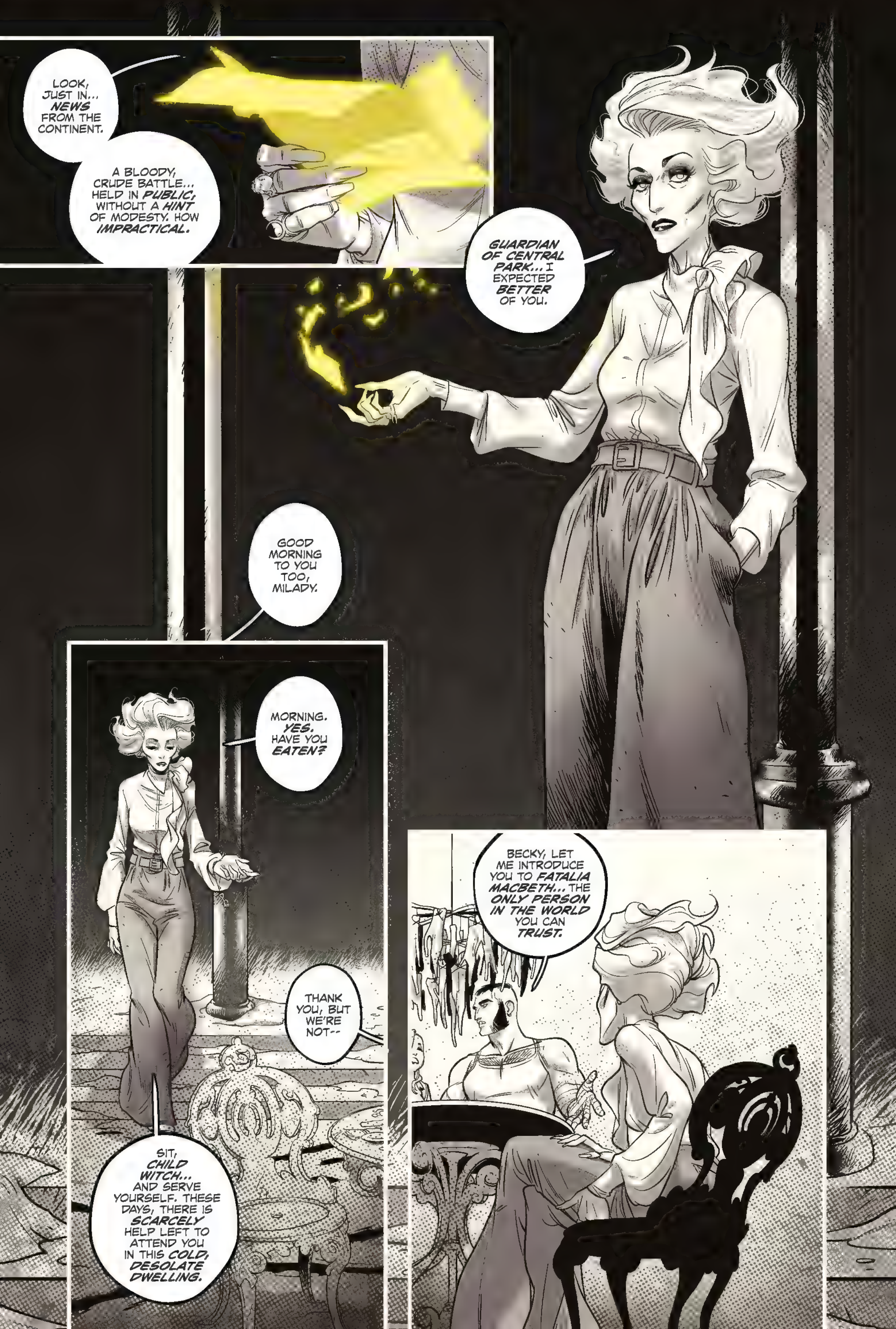

HOLD THAT *THOUGHT,* YOU MIGHT *JUST* LIVE THROUGH THIS--*HEY!* WE MADE IT!
THIS IS THE *OTHER SIDE...* ONE OF THE CITY GATES. *NORTH BROTHER ISLAND.*
FER?
AN *ISLAND* ABANDONED IN THE *EAST RIVER,* BETWEEN THE *BRONX* AND *RIKERS.* ON *ONE* SIDE, THERE'S RIVERSIDE HOSPITAL, SAID TO BE *HAUNTED--*
HEY! HOLD ON! I'M NOT TAKING *ONE MORE STEP* UNTIL YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU *ACTUALLY* ARE! YOU *SAID* YOU'D EXPLAIN EVERYTHING.
NOW, THAT'D BE A *SPOILER...* YOU NEED TO TALK TO *HER,* FIRST.
AND WHOEVER THIS "HER" IS, I'LL ASK HER A *MILLION* QUESTIONS, PROMISE. BUT WHAT *YOU* ARE? I WANT TO HEAR THAT FROM YOU.
OK.
JUST BE *CAREFUL...* IT'S NOT *SAFE* TO TOUCH ME LIKE THAT. I'LL *TELL* YOU, BUT FOR NOW...LET'S *MOVE.*
SLAP

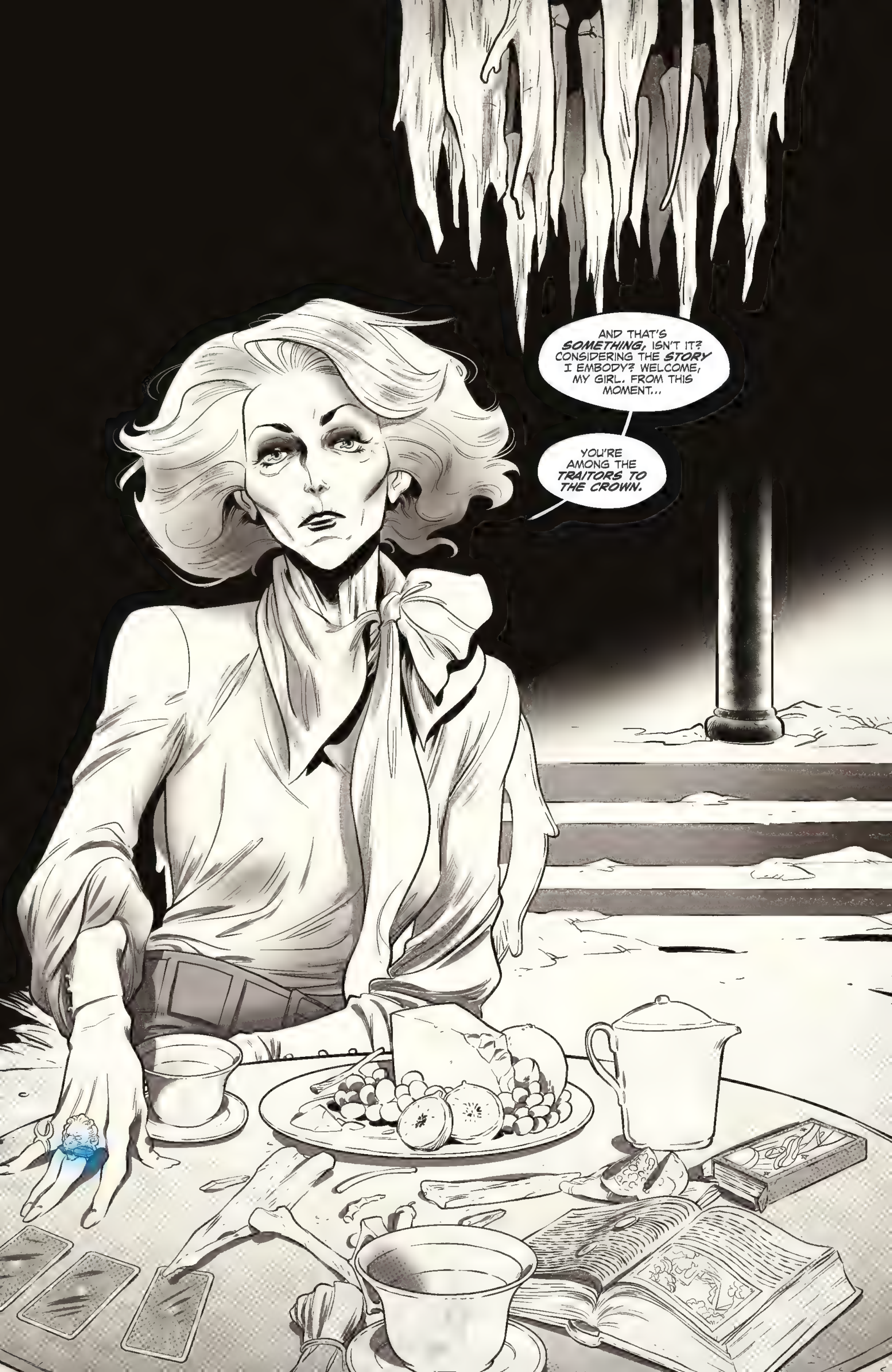

YOU'LL HAVE HEARD OF FINN McCOOL...
NOPE.
"THIS IS STARTING OFF *GREAT.*"
NO. WAIT. THE WAY *I* SEE IT, BASICALLY...
...YOU'RE JUST AN *ASSHOLE.*


THANKS FOR THE ANALYSIS.
YOU'RE SOME TYPE OF BEING THAT'S A FEW MILLENNIA OLD, BUT DOESN'T KNOW HOW OLD... JUST THAT'S HE'S SPENT THOSE MILLENNIA BETRAYING HIS FRIENDS AND LOVERS.
TURNING PEOPLE INTO DEER? PROTECTING CURSED FORESTS? TAMPERING WITH THE HAPPINESS OF HISTORY'S GREATEST HEROES? ORGANIZING FEASTS IN HONOR OF--
THEY'RE NOT FEASTS! THEY'RE SACRED ORGIES.
SORRY, I MUST'VE MISSED THAT...IN BETWEEN YOU PISSING ON ALTARS, DESECRATING CHURCHES, SEDUCING WIVES, DAUGHTERS, GRANDCHILDREN, AUNTS... ANY NUMBER OF WOMEN WHO COULD REPORT YOU TO THE POLICE FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT!
YOU COULDN'T BEGIN TO COMPREHEND THE PRIMORDIAL AND ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF LOVE!
CAN'T I? IF MY MOTHER HEARD YOU, YOU'D ALREADY BE A FEW MILLENNIA DEAD! THAT'S RIGHT...YOU'RE AN ASSHOLE, A LIAR, AND A PIG, WHO HAPPENS TO BE ENDOWED WITH MAGIC POWERS AND LONGEVITY. DID I MISS ANYTHING?
...
DIDN'T THINK SO.

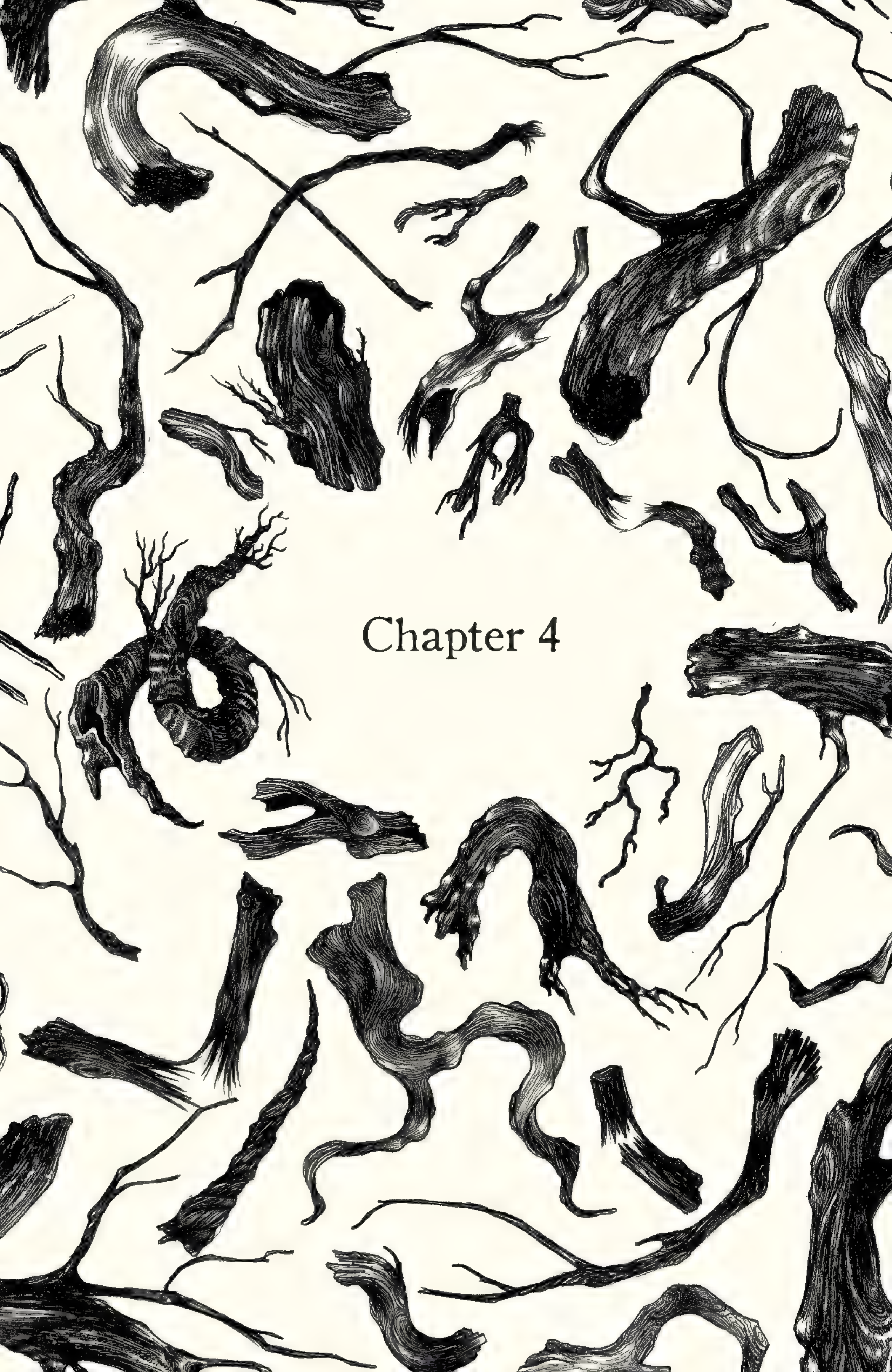

I AM A STORY, BECKY. LITERALLY. ALL MY PEOPLE ARE STORY INCARNATE, LIVING FAIRY TALES THAT GET DRUNK, SLEEP, DREAM, AND SOMETIMES... MAKE NEW STORIES.
THEY'VE CALLED ME FAUN, SATYR, PAN, GOAT...AND HUNDREDS OF OTHER NAMES. BUT NONE OF THEM ARE MY REAL NAME.
I'LL ALWAYS BE FER DOIRICH, THE OBSCURE DRUID WHO SUFFERED THE PAINS OF HELL FROM THE HEROES OF IRISH MYTHOLOGY. NOTHING ELSE.
OUR NAMES ARE OUR HISTORY... AND OUR DESTINY.
WE SURVIVE TIME BY INERTIA, GUARDING THE MEMORIES OF ALL THAT WE'VE BEEN.
AND... YOU CAN'T STOP, COULDN'T CHANGE... EVEN IF YOU WANTED TO.
YEAH.
READY TO GO?
YEAH... READY TO GO.

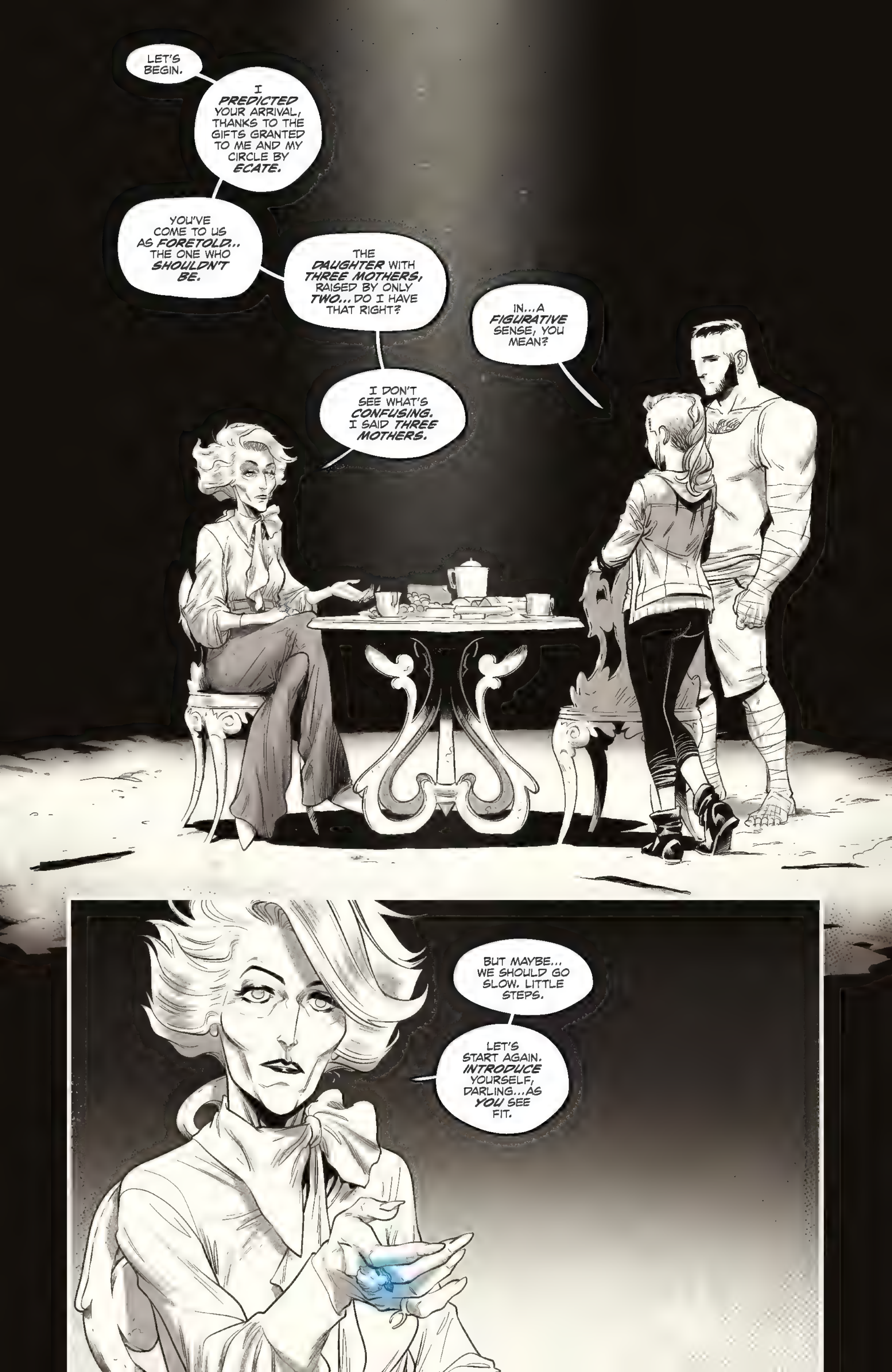

CAREFUL, THERE'S GLASS EVERYWHERE.
SAYS THE *ASSHOLE* WITH *BARE FEET.*
THE ISLAND IS *TINY,* BUT SOMEHOW THIS PLACE LOOKS *HUGE.*
NOT *HUGE.* JUST *EMPTY.*
AND BEAUTIFUL.

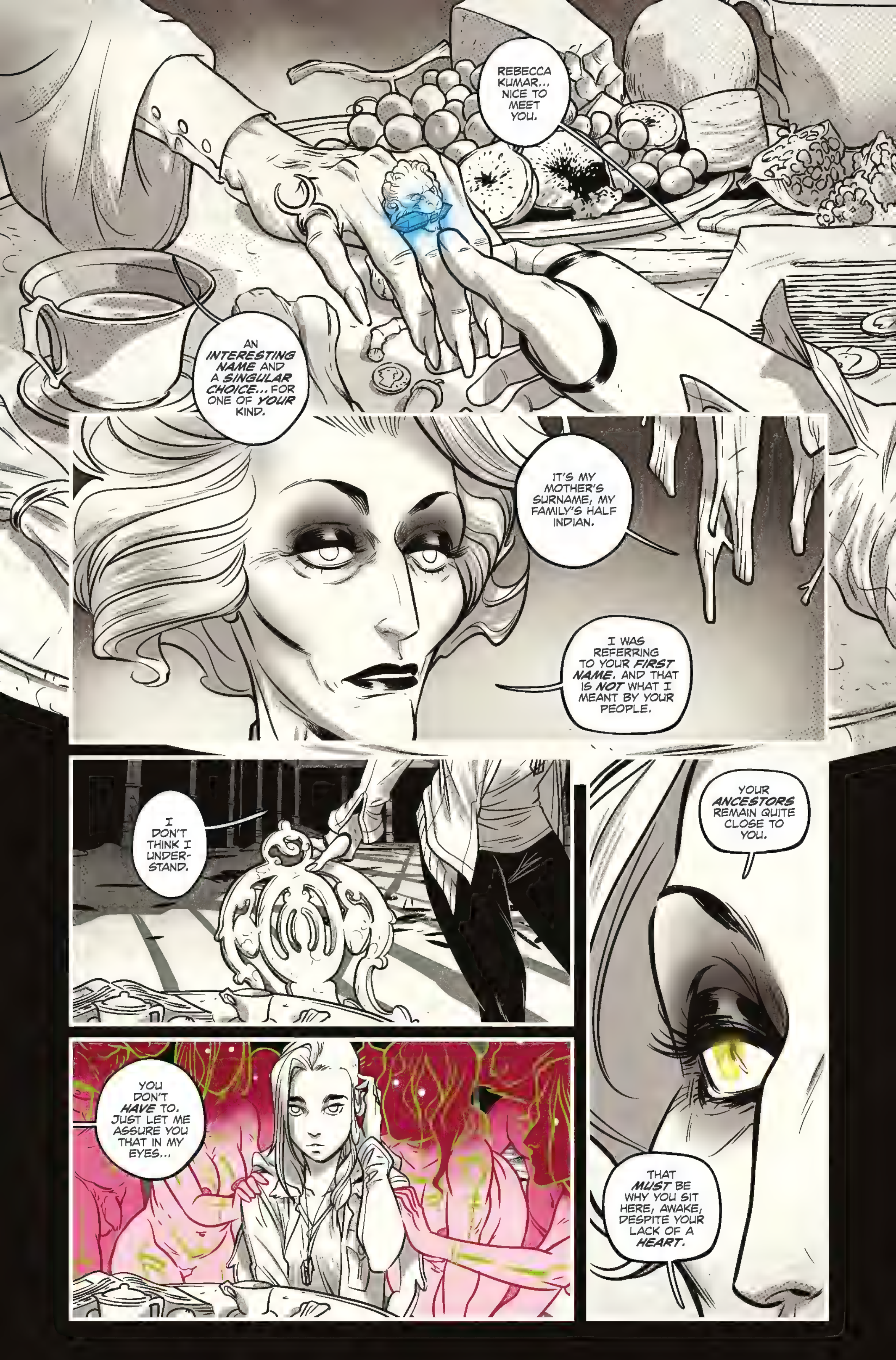

LOOK, JUST IN... NEWS FROM THE CONTINENT.
A BLOODY, CRUDE BATTLE... HELD IN PUBLIC, WITHOUT A HINT OF MODESTY. HOW IMPRACTICAL.
GUARDIAN OF CENTRAL PARK... I EXPECTED BETTER OF YOU.
GOOD MORNING TO YOU TOO, MILADY.
MORNING. YES. HAVE YOU EATEN?
THANK YOU, BUT WE'RE NOT--
SIT, CHILD WITCH... AND SERVE YOURSELF. THESE DAYS, THERE IS SCARCELY HELP LEFT TO ATTEND YOU IN THIS COLD, DESOLATE DWELLING.
BECKY, LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO FATALIA MACBETH... THE ONLY PERSON IN THE WORLD YOU CAN TRUST.

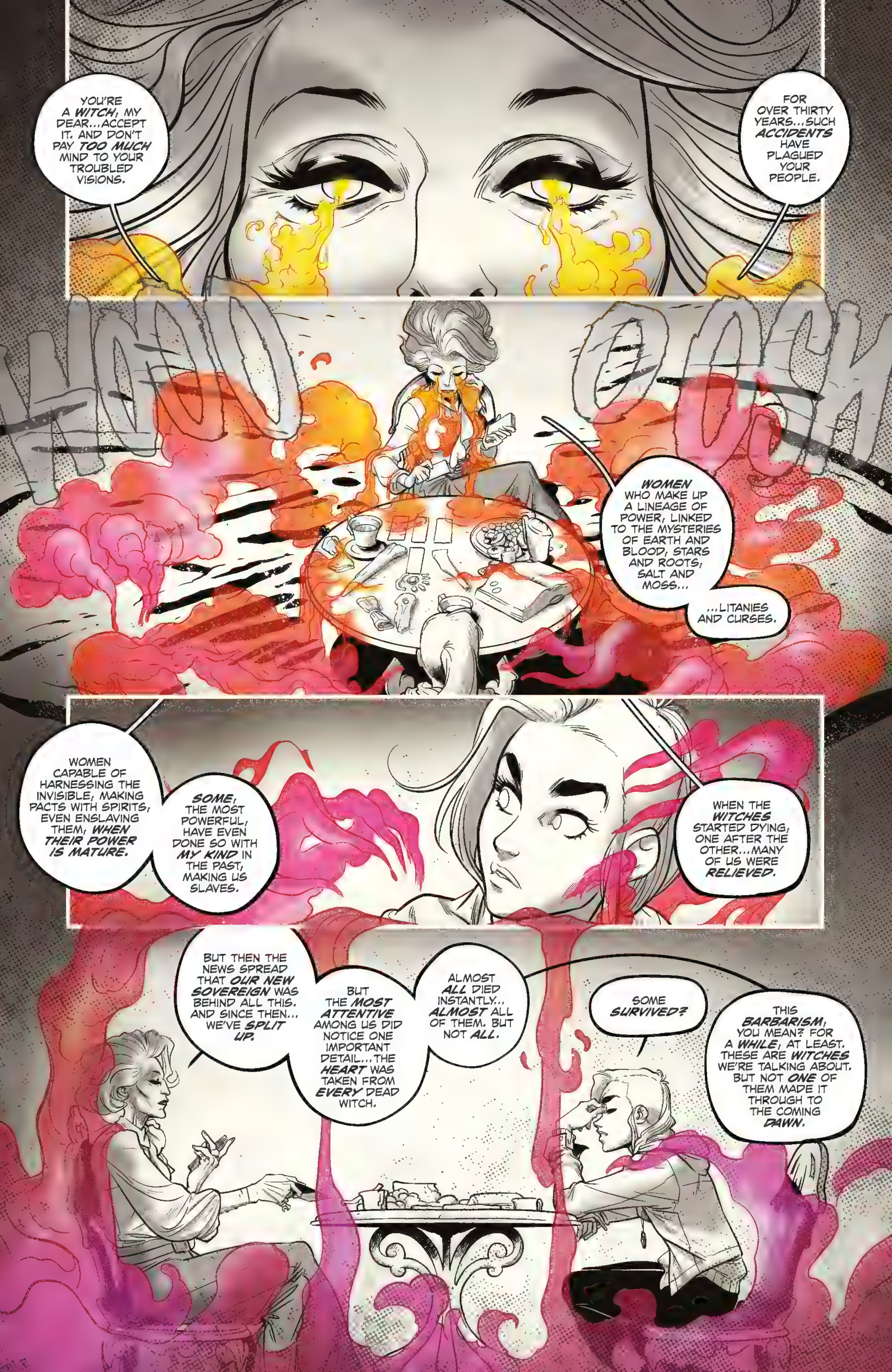

AND THAT'S *SOMETHING,* ISN'T IT? CONSIDERING THE *STORY* I EMBODY? WELCOME, MY GIRL. FROM THIS MOMENT...
YOU'RE AMONG THE *TRAITORS TO THE CROWN.*

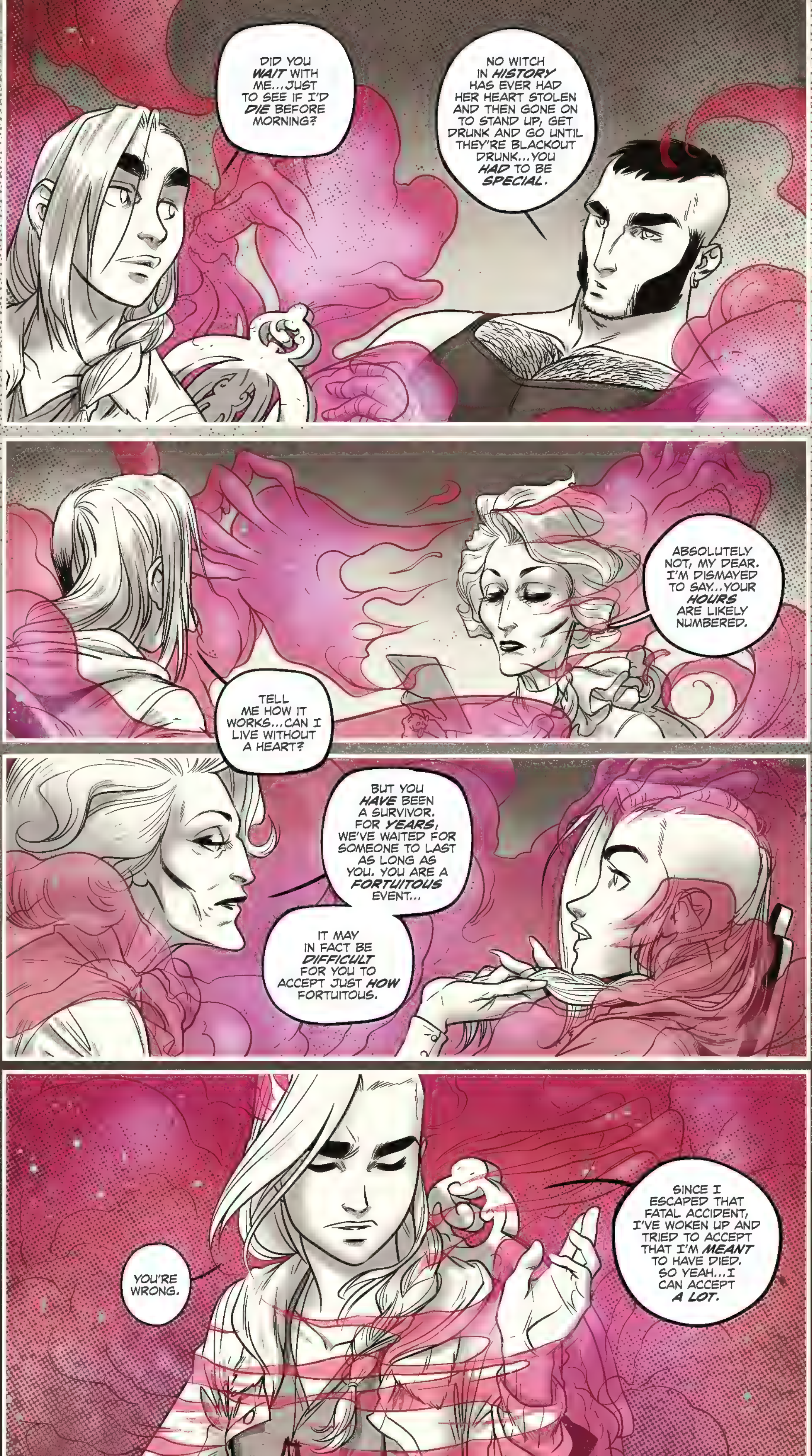
Chapter 4

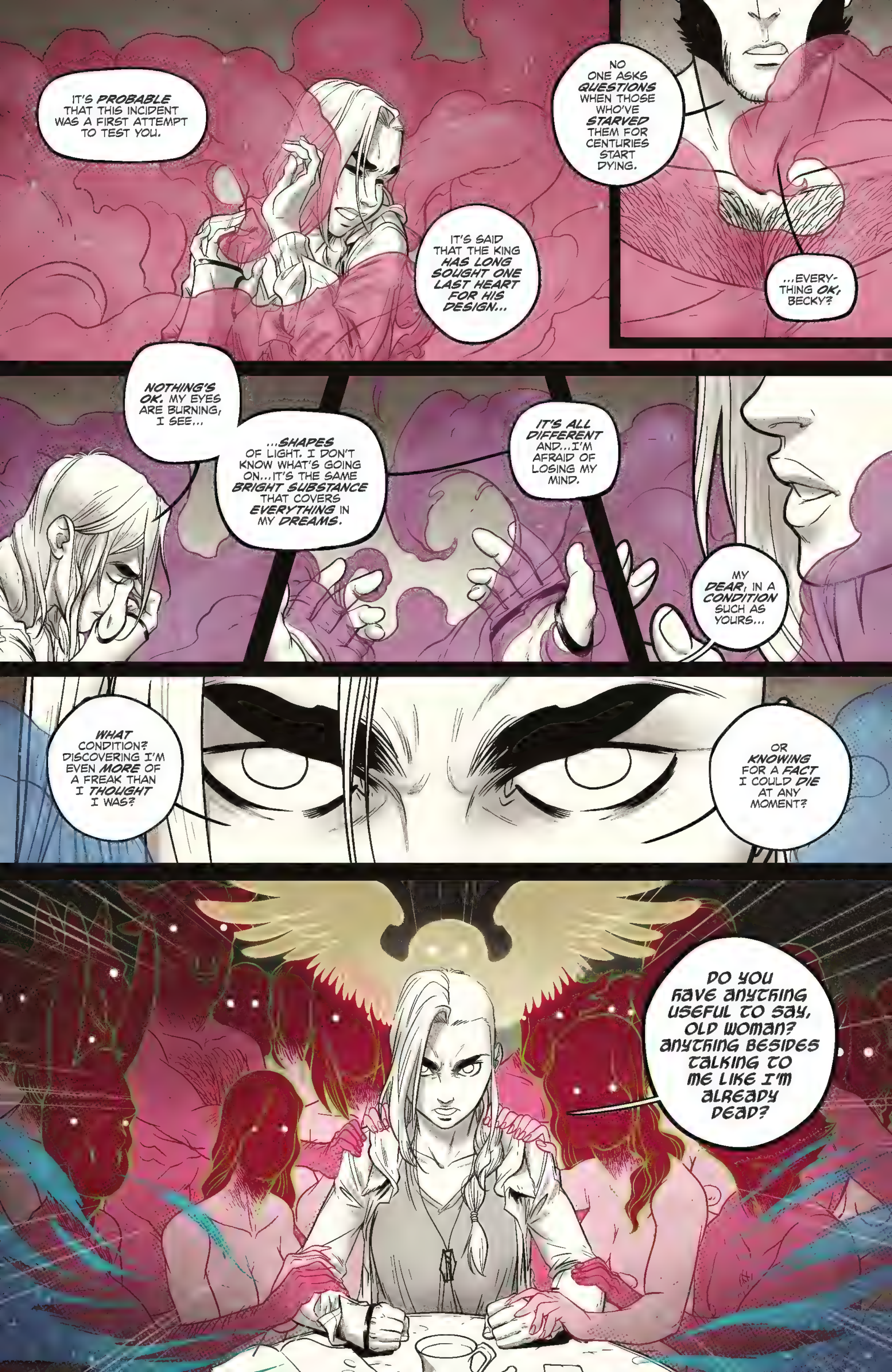


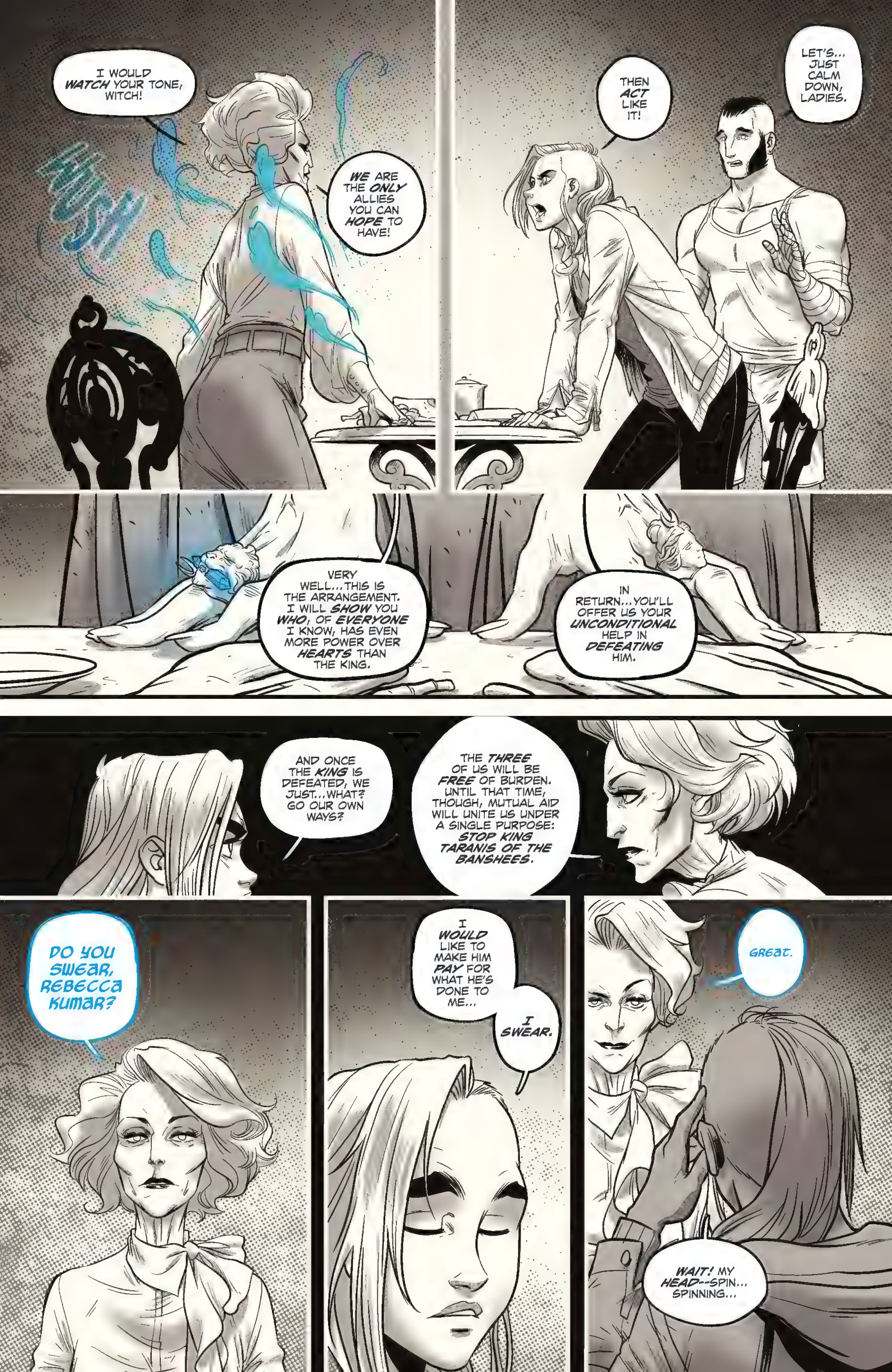

LET'S BEGIN.
I *PREDICTED* YOUR ARRIVAL, THANKS TO THE GIFTS GRANTED TO ME AND MY CIRCLE BY *ECATE.*
YOU'VE COME TO US AS *FORETOLD...* THE ONE WHO *SHOULDN'T BE.*
THE *DAUGHTER* WITH *THREE MOTHERS,* RAISED BY ONLY *TWO...* DO I HAVE THAT RIGHT?
IN...A *FIGURATIVE* SENSE, YOU MEAN?
I DON'T SEE WHAT'S *CONFUSING.* I SAID *THREE MOTHERS.*
BUT MAYBE... WE SHOULD GO SLOW. LITTLE STEPS.
LET'S START AGAIN. *INTRODUCE* YOURSELF, DARLING...AS *YOU* SEE FIT.

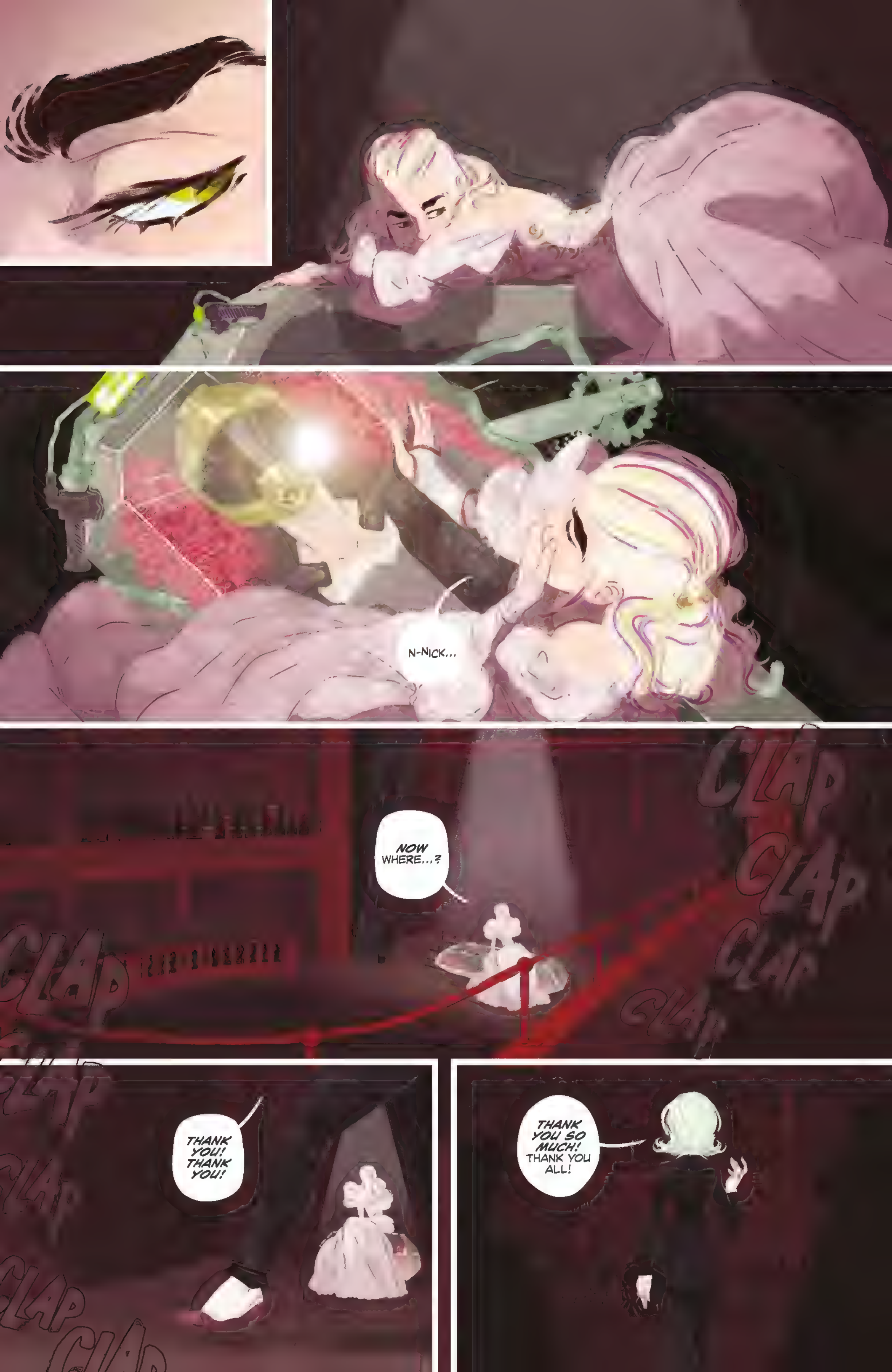

REBECCA KUMAR... NICE TO MEET YOU.
AN *INTERESTING NAME* AND A *SINGULAR CHOICE...* FOR ONE OF *YOUR* KIND.
IT'S MY MOTHER'S SURNAME, MY FAMILY'S HALF INDIAN.
I WAS REFERRING TO YOUR *FIRST NAME.* AND THAT IS *NOT* WHAT I MEANT BY YOUR PEOPLE.
I DON'T THINK I UNDERSTAND.
YOUR *ANCESTORS* REMAIN QUITE CLOSE TO YOU.
YOU DON'T *HAVE* TO. JUST LET ME ASSURE YOU THAT IN MY EYES...
THAT *MUST* BE WHY YOU SIT HERE, AWAKE, DESPITE YOUR LACK OF A *HEART.*

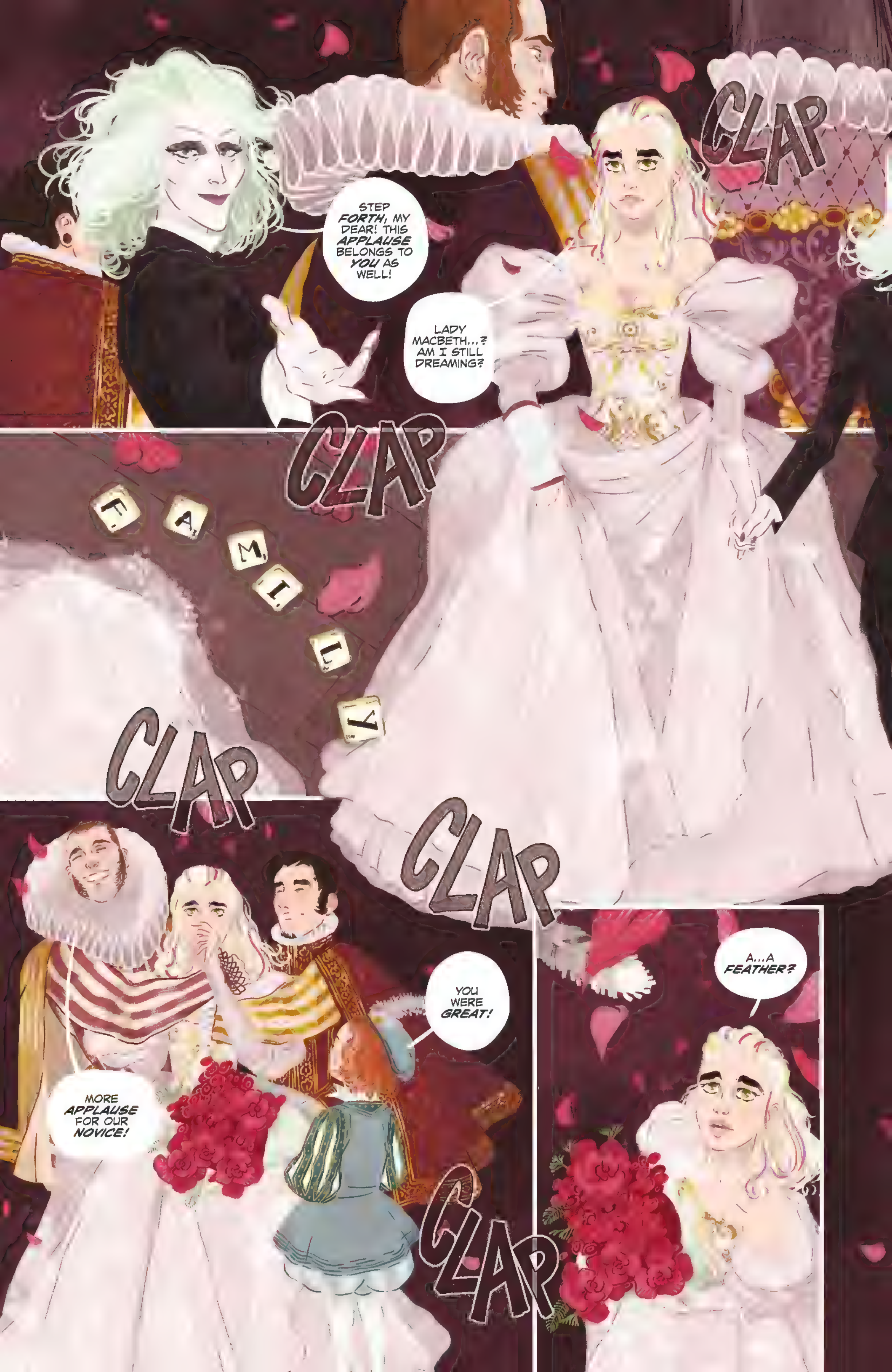

YOU'RE A *WITCH*, MY DEAR...ACCEPT IT. AND DON'T PAY *TOO MUCH* MIND TO YOUR TROUBLED VISIONS.
FOR OVER THIRTY YEARS...SUCH *ACCIDENTS* HAVE PLAGUED YOUR PEOPLE.
WOMEN WHO MAKE UP A LINEAGE OF POWER, LINKED TO THE MYSTERIES OF EARTH AND BLOOD, STARS AND ROOTS, SALT AND MOSS...
...LITANIES AND CURSES.
WOMEN CAPABLE OF HARNESSING THE INVISIBLE, MAKING PACTS WITH SPIRITS, EVEN ENSLAVING THEM, *WHEN THEIR POWER IS MATURE.*
SOME, THE MOST POWERFUL, HAVE EVEN DONE SO WITH *MY KIND* IN THE PAST, MAKING US SLAVES.
WHEN THE *WITCHES* STARTED DYING, ONE AFTER THE OTHER...MANY OF US WERE *RELIEVED*.
BUT THEN THE NEWS SPREAD THAT *OUR NEW SOVEREIGN* WAS BEHIND ALL THIS. AND SINCE THEN... WE'VE *SPLIT UP*.
BUT THE *MOST ATTENTIVE* AMONG US DID NOTICE ONE IMPORTANT DETAIL...THE *HEART* WAS TAKEN FROM *EVERY* DEAD WITCH.
ALMOST *ALL* DIED INSTANTLY... *ALMOST* ALL OF THEM. BUT NOT *ALL*.
SOME *SURVIVED?*
THIS *BARBARISM*, YOU MEAN? FOR A *WHILE*, AT LEAST. THESE ARE *WITCHES* WE'RE TALKING ABOUT. BUT NOT *ONE* OF THEM MADE IT THROUGH TO THE COMING *DAWN*.

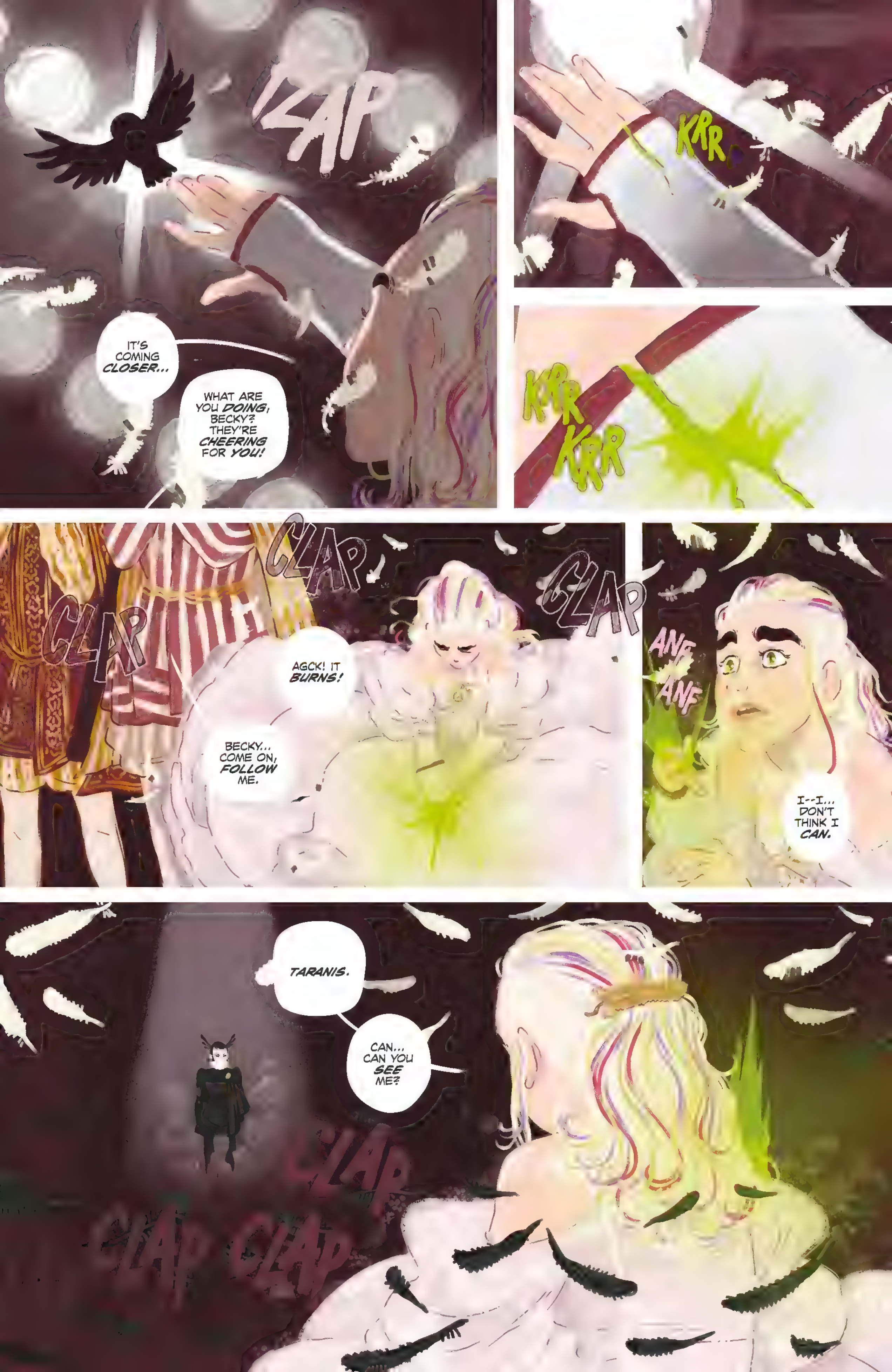

DID YOU *WAIT* WITH ME…JUST TO SEE IF I'D *DIE* BEFORE MORNING?
NO WITCH IN *HISTORY* HAS EVER HAD HER HEART STOLEN AND THEN GONE ON TO STAND UP, GET DRUNK AND GO UNTIL THEY'RE BLACKOUT DRUNK…YOU *HAD* TO BE *SPECIAL*.
ABSOLUTELY NOT, MY DEAR. I'M DISMAYED TO SAY…YOUR *HOURS* ARE LIKELY NUMBERED.
TELL ME HOW IT WORKS…CAN I LIVE WITHOUT A HEART?
BUT YOU *HAVE* BEEN A SURVIVOR. FOR *YEARS*, WE'VE WAITED FOR SOMEONE TO LAST AS LONG AS YOU. YOU ARE A *FORTUITOUS* EVENT…
IT MAY IN FACT BE *DIFFICULT* FOR YOU TO ACCEPT JUST *HOW* FORTUITOUS.
YOU'RE WRONG.
SINCE I ESCAPED THAT FATAL ACCIDENT, I'VE WOKEN UP AND TRIED TO ACCEPT THAT I'M *MEANT* TO HAVE DIED. SO YEAH…I CAN ACCEPT *A LOT*.

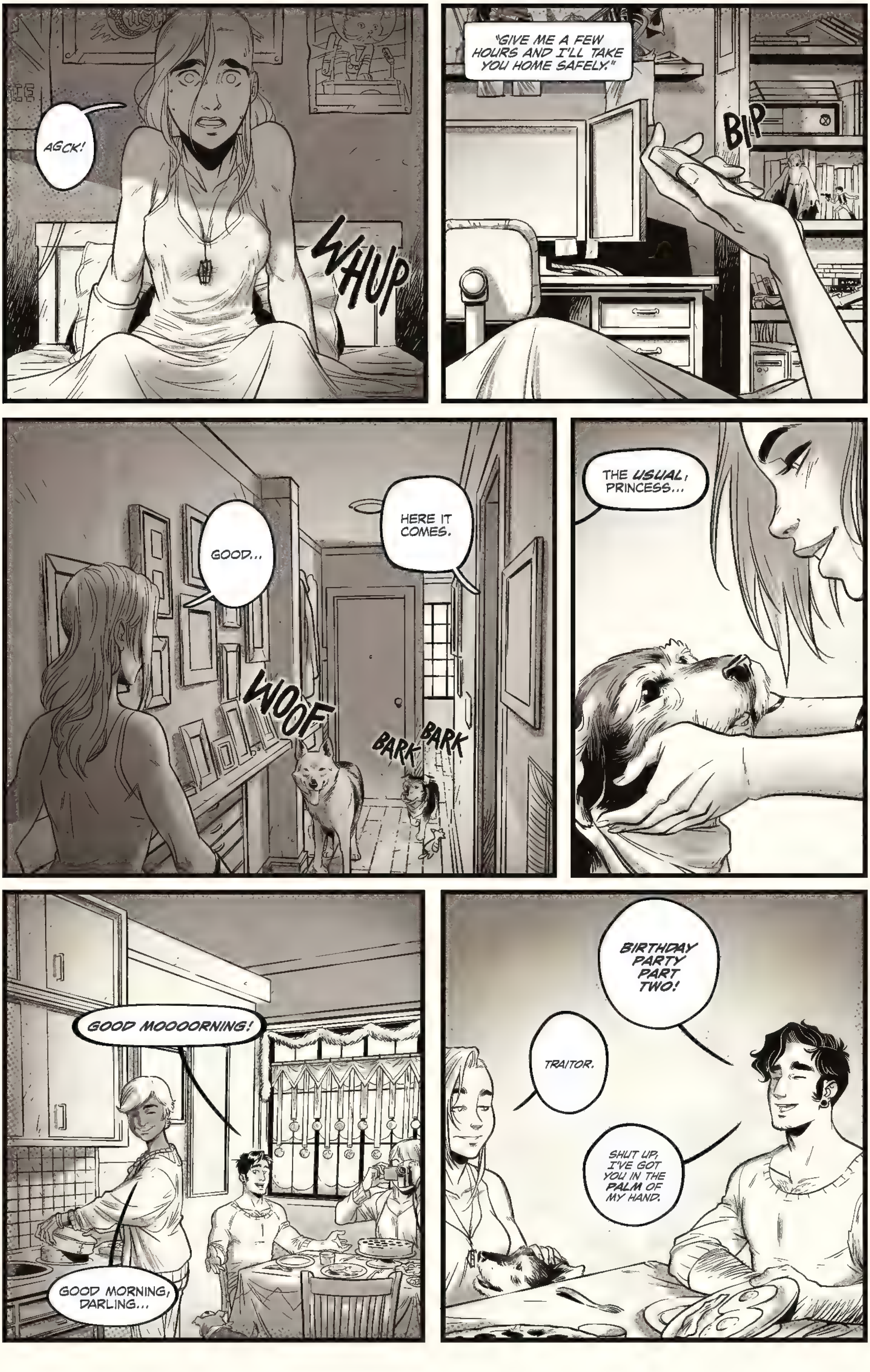

IT'S *PROBABLE* THAT THIS INCIDENT WAS A FIRST ATTEMPT TO TEST YOU.
IT'S SAID THAT THE KING *HAS LONG SOUGHT ONE LAST HEART FOR HIS DESIGN...*
NO ONE ASKS *QUESTIONS* WHEN THOSE WHO'VE *STARVED* THEM FOR CENTURIES START DYING.
...EVERYTHING *OK,* BECKY?
NOTHING'S OK. MY EYES ARE BURNING, I SEE...
...*SHAPES* OF LIGHT. I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON...IT'S THE SAME *BRIGHT SUBSTANCE* THAT COVERS *EVERYTHING* IN MY *DREAMS.*
IT'S ALL DIFFERENT AND...I'M AFRAID OF LOSING MY MIND.
MY *DEAR,* IN A *CONDITION* SUCH AS YOURS...
WHAT CONDITION? DISCOVERING I'M EVEN *MORE* OF A FREAK THAN I *THOUGHT* I WAS?
OR *KNOWING* FOR A *FACT* I COULD *DIE* AT ANY MOMENT?
DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING USEFUL TO SAY, OLD WOMAN? ANYTHING BESIDES TALKING TO ME LIKE I'M ALREADY DEAD?

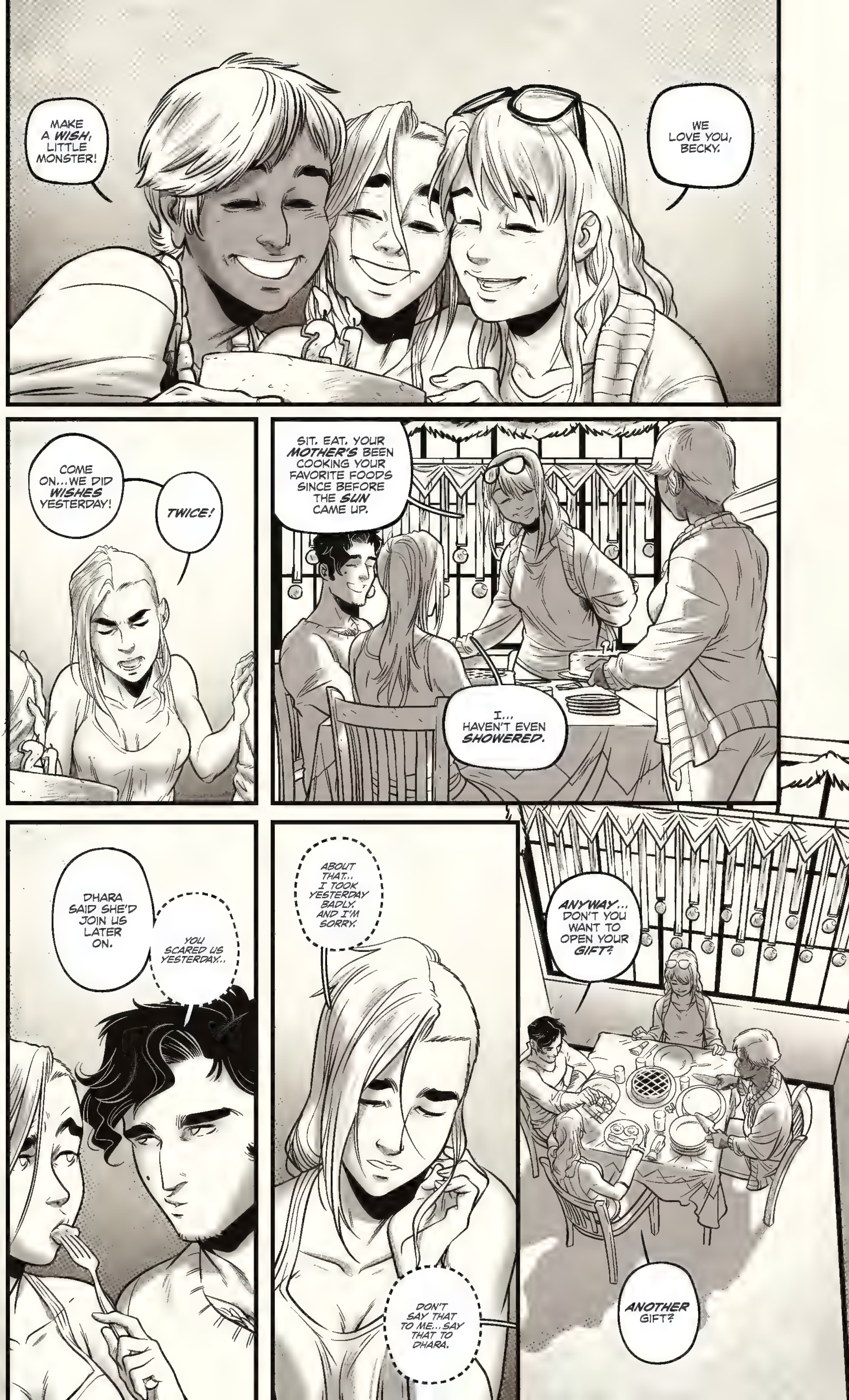

I WOULD WATCH YOUR TONE, WITCH!
WHSH
WE ARE THE ONLY ALLIES YOU CAN HOPE TO HAVE!
THEN ACT LIKE IT!
LET'S... JUST CALM DOWN, LADIES.
VERY WELL... THIS IS THE ARRANGEMENT. I WILL SHOW YOU WHO, OF EVERYONE I KNOW, HAS EVEN MORE POWER OVER HEARTS THAN THE KING.
IN RETURN... YOU'LL OFFER US YOUR UNCONDITIONAL HELP IN DEFEATING HIM.
AND ONCE THE KING IS DEFEATED, WE JUST... WHAT? GO OUR OWN WAYS?
THE THREE OF US WILL BE FREE OF BURDEN. UNTIL THAT TIME, THOUGH, MUTUAL AID WILL UNITE US UNDER A SINGLE PURPOSE: STOP KING TARANIS OF THE BANSHEES.
DO YOU SWEAR, REBECCA KUMAR?
I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE HIM PAY FOR WHAT HE'S DONE TO ME...
I SWEAR.
GREAT.
WAIT! MY HEAD--SPIN... SPINNING...

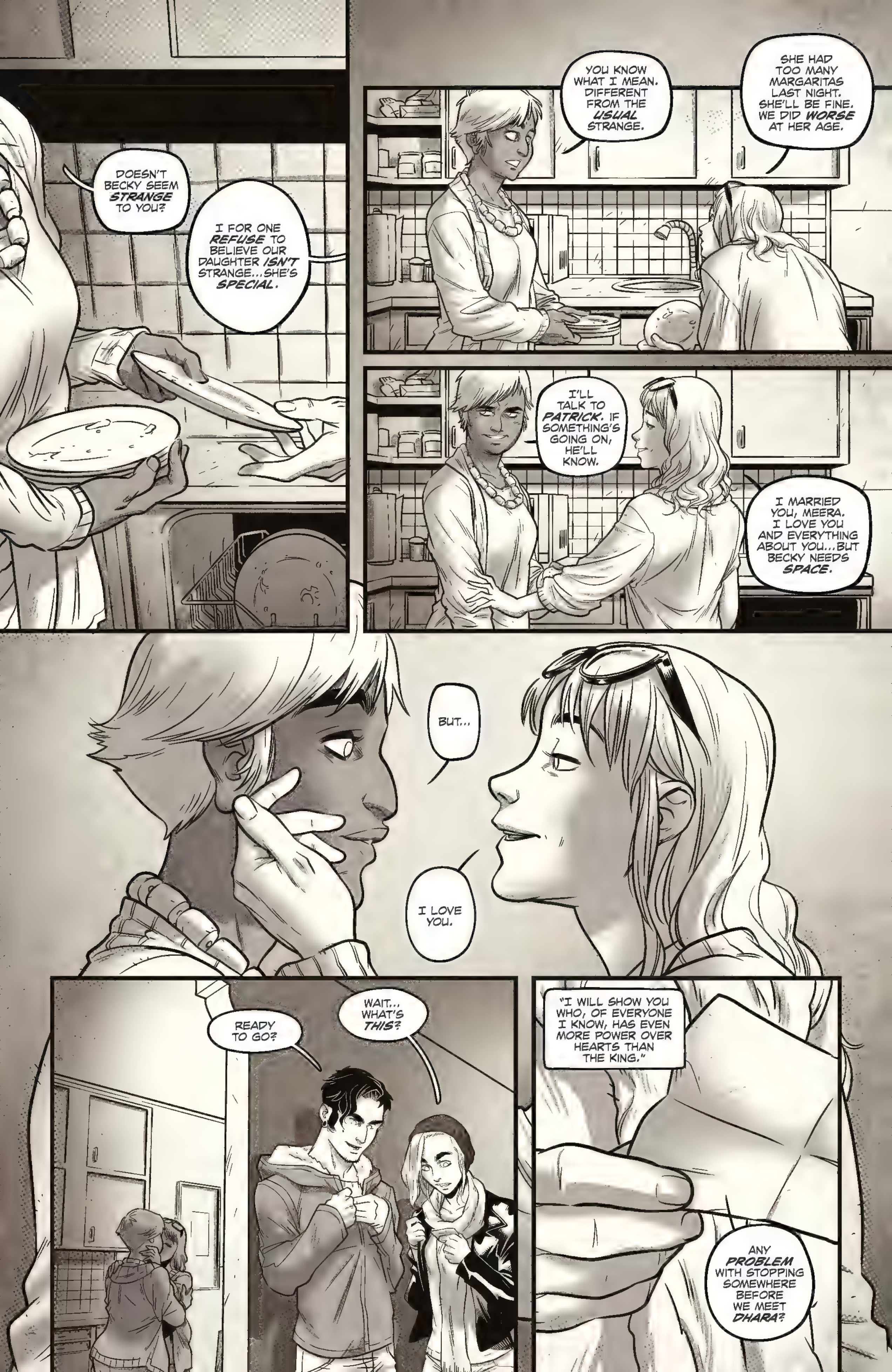

N-NICK...
NOW WHERE...?
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
THANK YOU! THANK YOU!
CLAP
CLAP
THANK YOU SO MUCH! THANK YOU ALL!

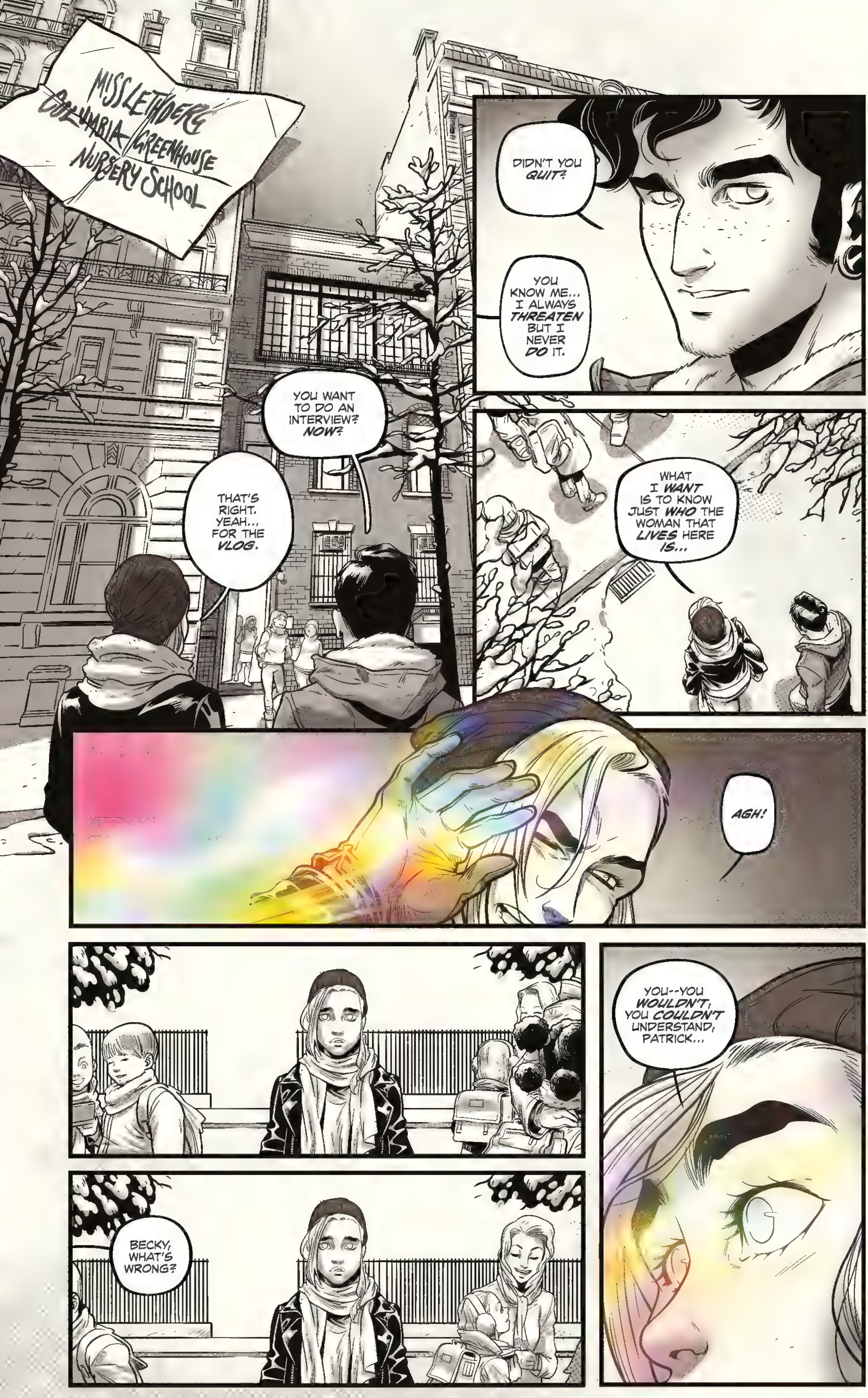

CLAP
STEP FORTH, MY DEAR! THIS APPLAUSE BELONGS TO YOU AS WELL!
LADY MACBETH...? AM I STILL DREAMING?
CLAP
F A M I L Y
CLAP
CLAP
YOU WERE GREAT!
MORE APPLAUSE FOR OUR NOVICE!
CLAP
A...A FEATHER?

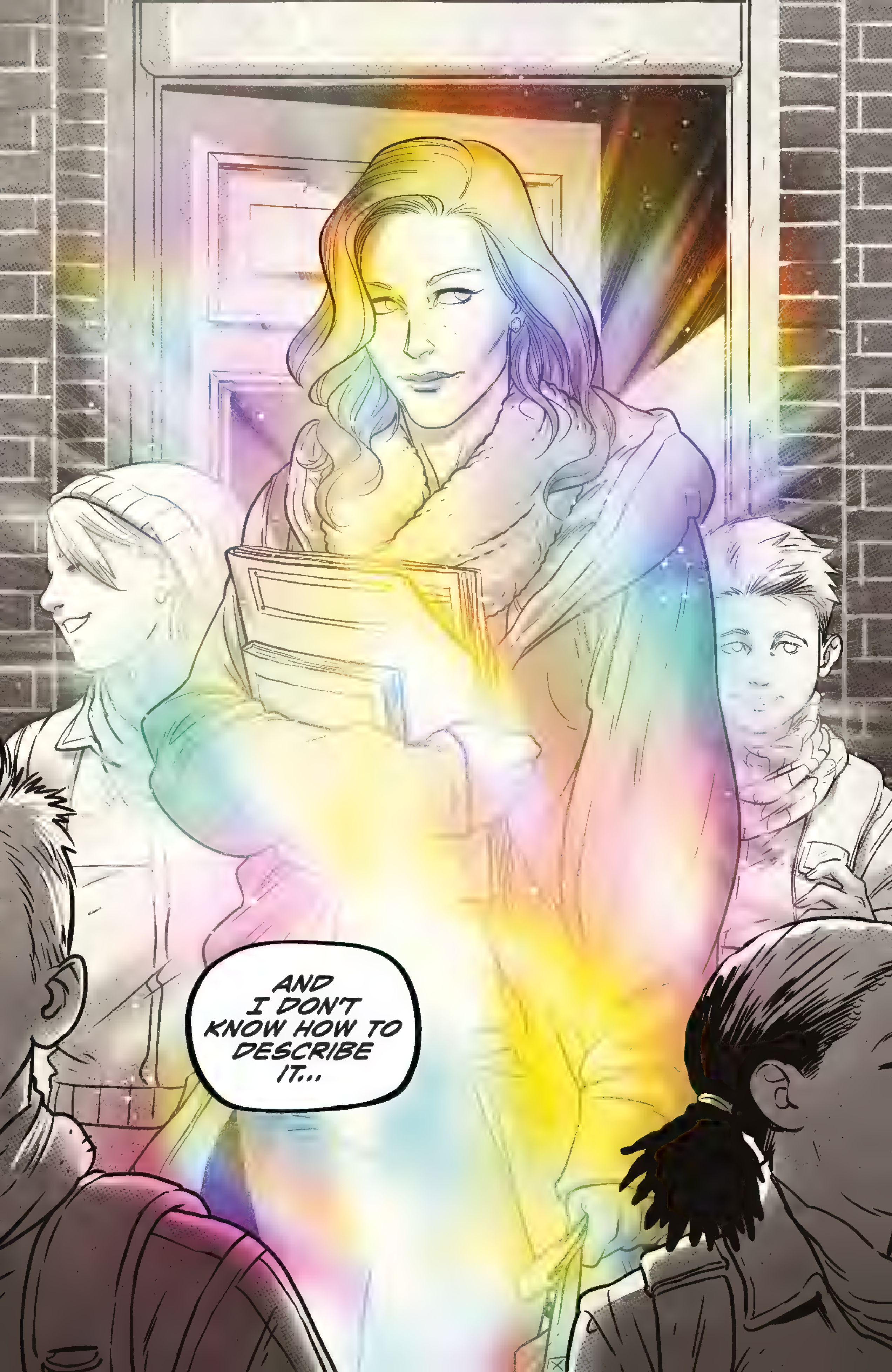

CLAP
IT'S COMING *CLOSER*...
WHAT ARE YOU *DOING*, BECKY? THEY'RE *CHEERING* FOR *YOU!*
KRR
KRR
KRR
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
AGCK! IT *BURNS!*
BECKY... COME ON, *FOLLOW* ME.
ANF
ANF
I--I... DON'T THINK I *CAN.*
TARANIS.
CAN... CAN YOU *SEE* ME?
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP

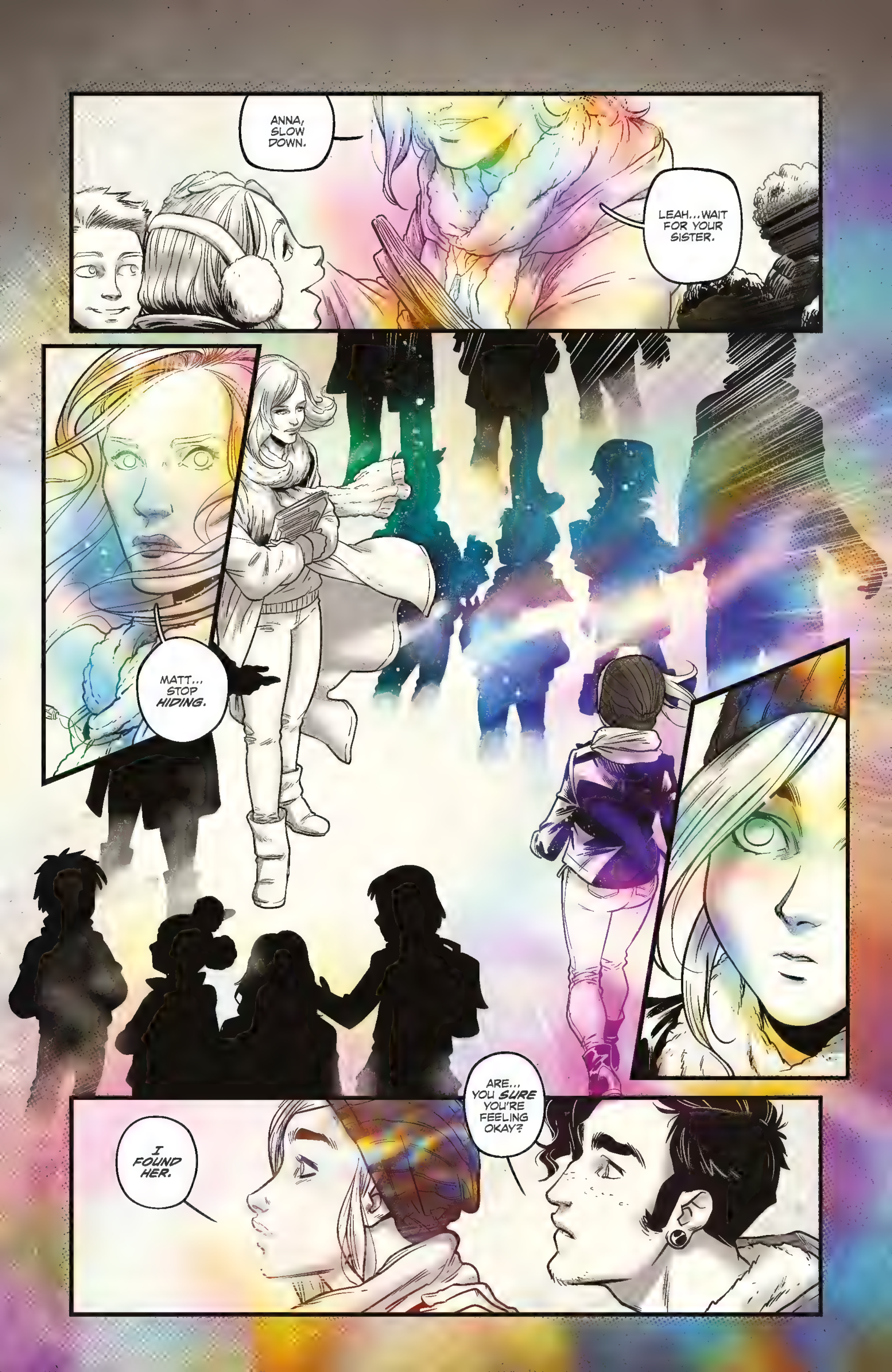

AGCK!
WHUP
"GIVE ME A FEW HOURS AND I'LL TAKE YOU HOME SAFELY."
BIP
GOOD...
HERE IT COMES.
WOOF
BARK
BARK
THE *USUAL*, PRINCESS...
GOOD MOOOORNING!
GOOD MORNING, DARLING...
BIRTHDAY PARTY PART TWO!
TRAITOR.
SHUT UP, I'VE GOT YOU IN THE *PALM* OF MY HAND.

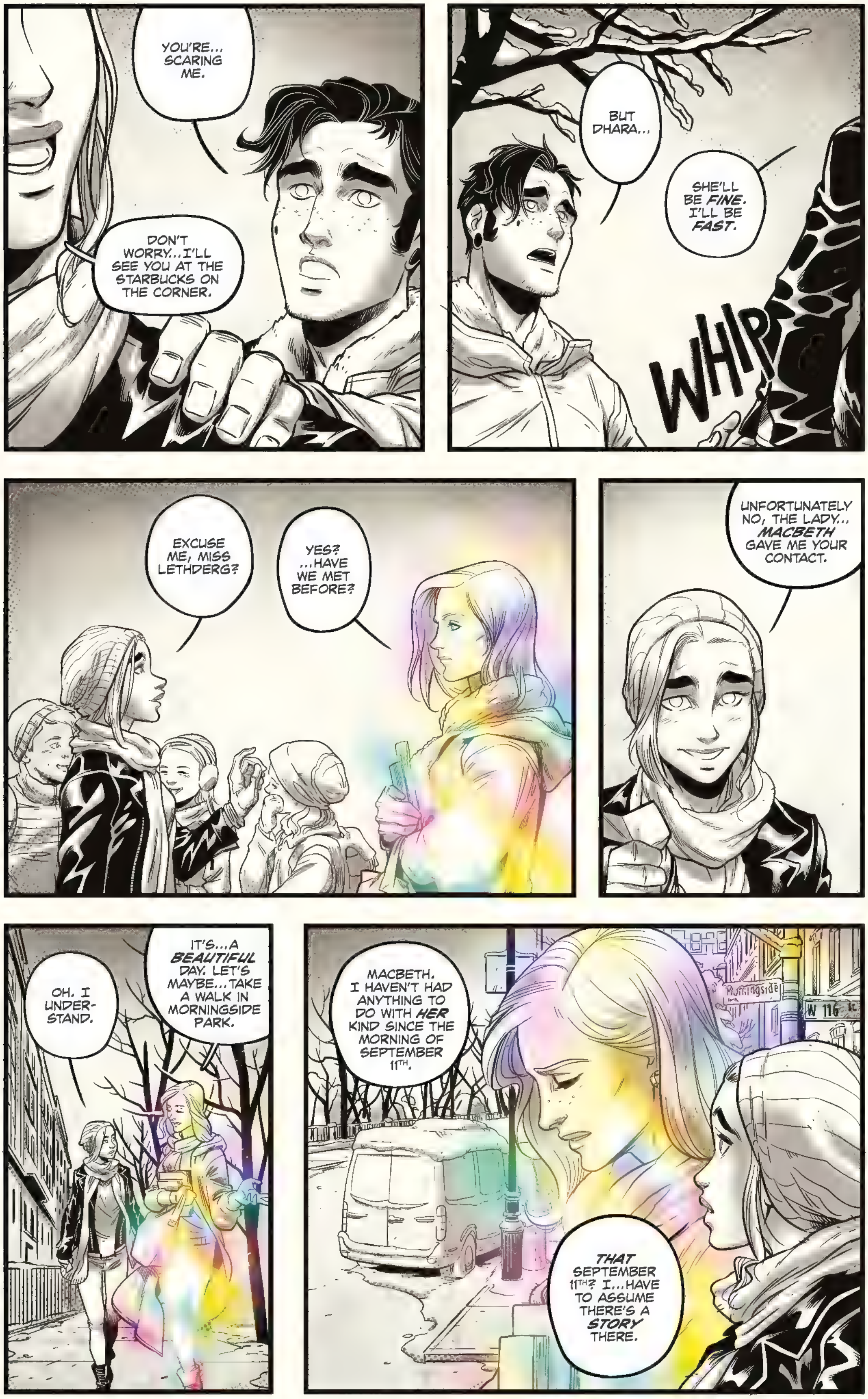

MAKE A *WISH*, LITTLE MONSTER!
WE LOVE YOU, BECKY.
21
COME ON...WE DID *WISHES* YESTERDAY!
TWICE!
21
SIT. EAT. YOUR *MOTHER'S* BEEN COOKING YOUR FAVORITE FOODS SINCE BEFORE THE *SUN* CAME UP.
I... HAVEN'T EVEN *SHOWERED.*
DHARA SAID SHE'D JOIN US LATER ON.
YOU SCARED US YESTERDAY...
ABOUT THAT... I TOOK YESTERDAY BADLY. AND I'M SORRY.
DON'T SAY THAT TO ME... SAY THAT TO DHARA.
ANYWAY... DON'T YOU WANT TO OPEN YOUR *GIFT?*
ANOTHER GIFT?

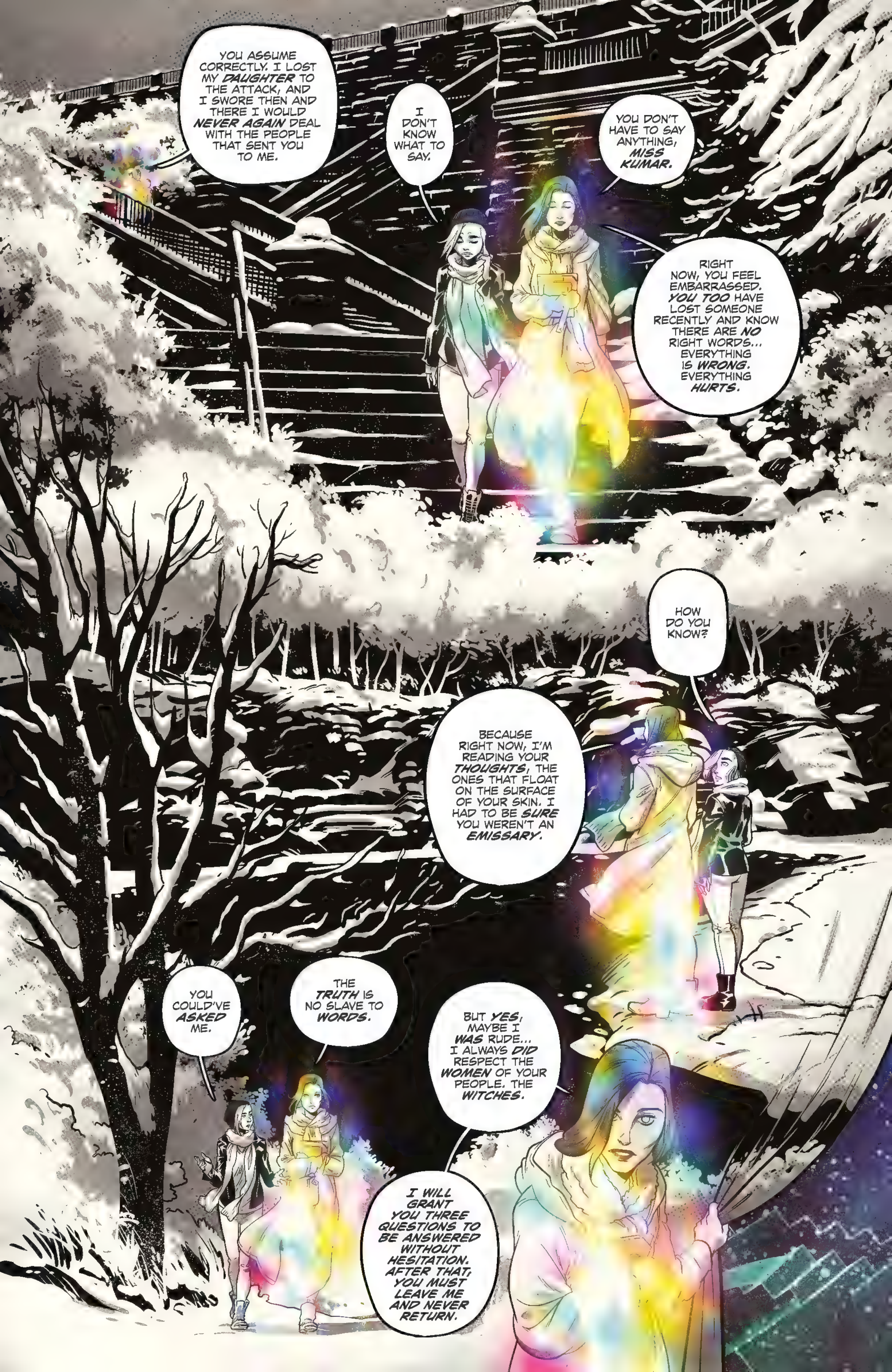

DOESN'T BECKY SEEM STRANGE TO YOU?
I FOR ONE REFUSE TO BELIEVE OUR DAUGHTER ISN'T STRANGE...SHE'S SPECIAL.
YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN. DIFFERENT FROM THE USUAL STRANGE.
SHE HAD TOO MANY MARGARITAS LAST NIGHT. SHE'LL BE FINE. WE DID WORSE AT HER AGE.
I'LL TALK TO PATRICK. IF SOMETHING'S GOING ON, HE'LL KNOW.
I MARRIED YOU, MEERA. I LOVE YOU AND EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU...BUT BECKY NEEDS SPACE.
BUT...
I LOVE YOU.
READY TO GO?
WAIT... WHAT'S THIS?
"I WILL SHOW YOU WHO, OF EVERYONE I KNOW, HAS EVEN MORE POWER OVER HEARTS THAN THE KING."
ANY PROBLEM WITH STOPPING SOMEWHERE BEFORE WE MEET DHARA?

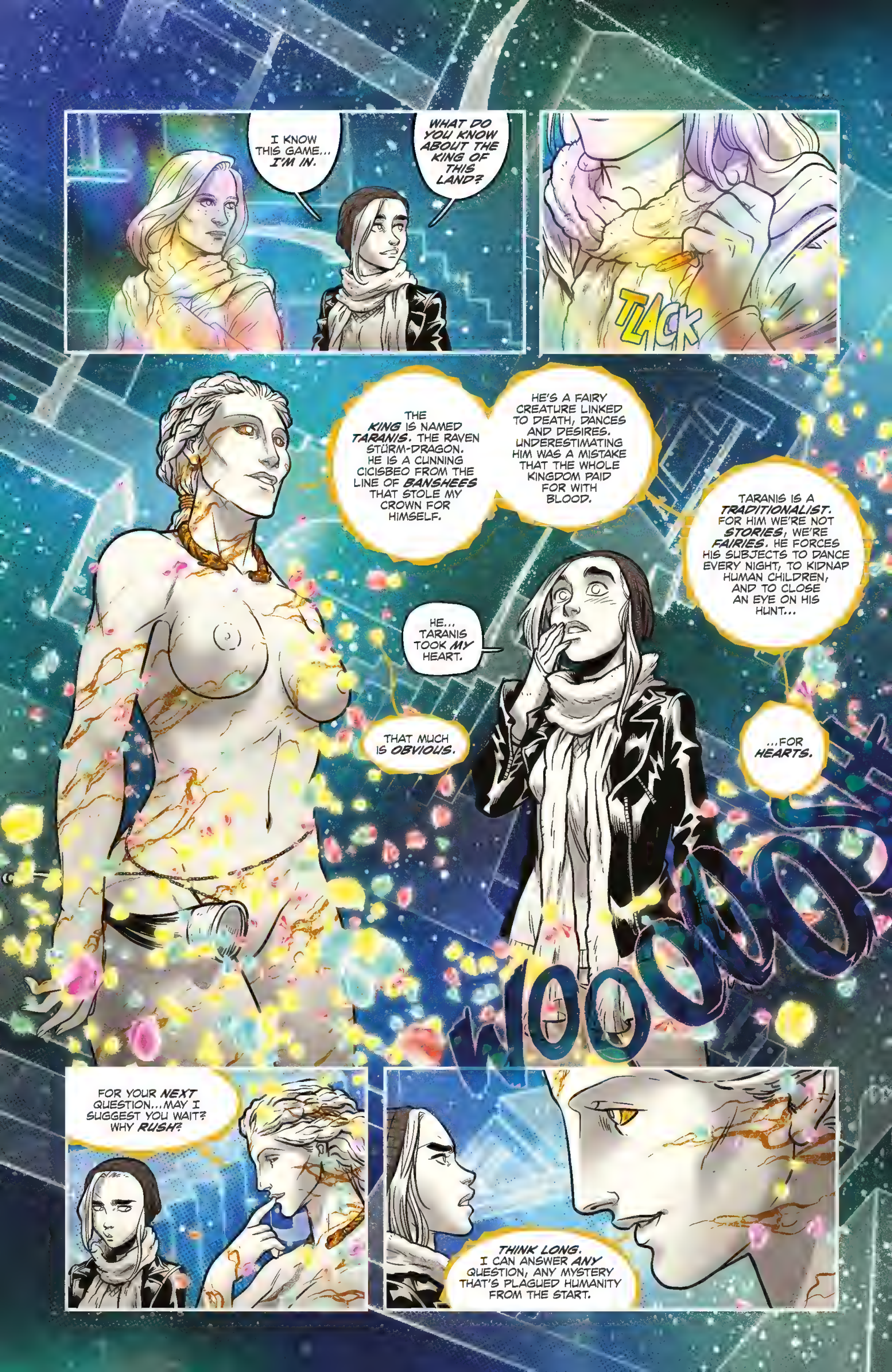

MISS LETHDERG COLUMBIA GREENHOUSE NURSERY SCHOOL
YOU WANT TO DO AN INTERVIEW? *NOW?*
THAT'S RIGHT. YEAH... FOR THE *VLOG.*
DIDN'T YOU *QUIT?*
YOU KNOW ME... I ALWAYS *THREATEN* BUT I NEVER *DO* IT.
WHAT I *WANT* IS TO KNOW JUST *WHO* THE WOMAN THAT *LIVES* HERE *IS...*
AGH!
YOU--YOU *WOULDN'T*, YOU *COULDN'T* UNDERSTAND, PATRICK...
BECKY, WHAT'S WRONG?

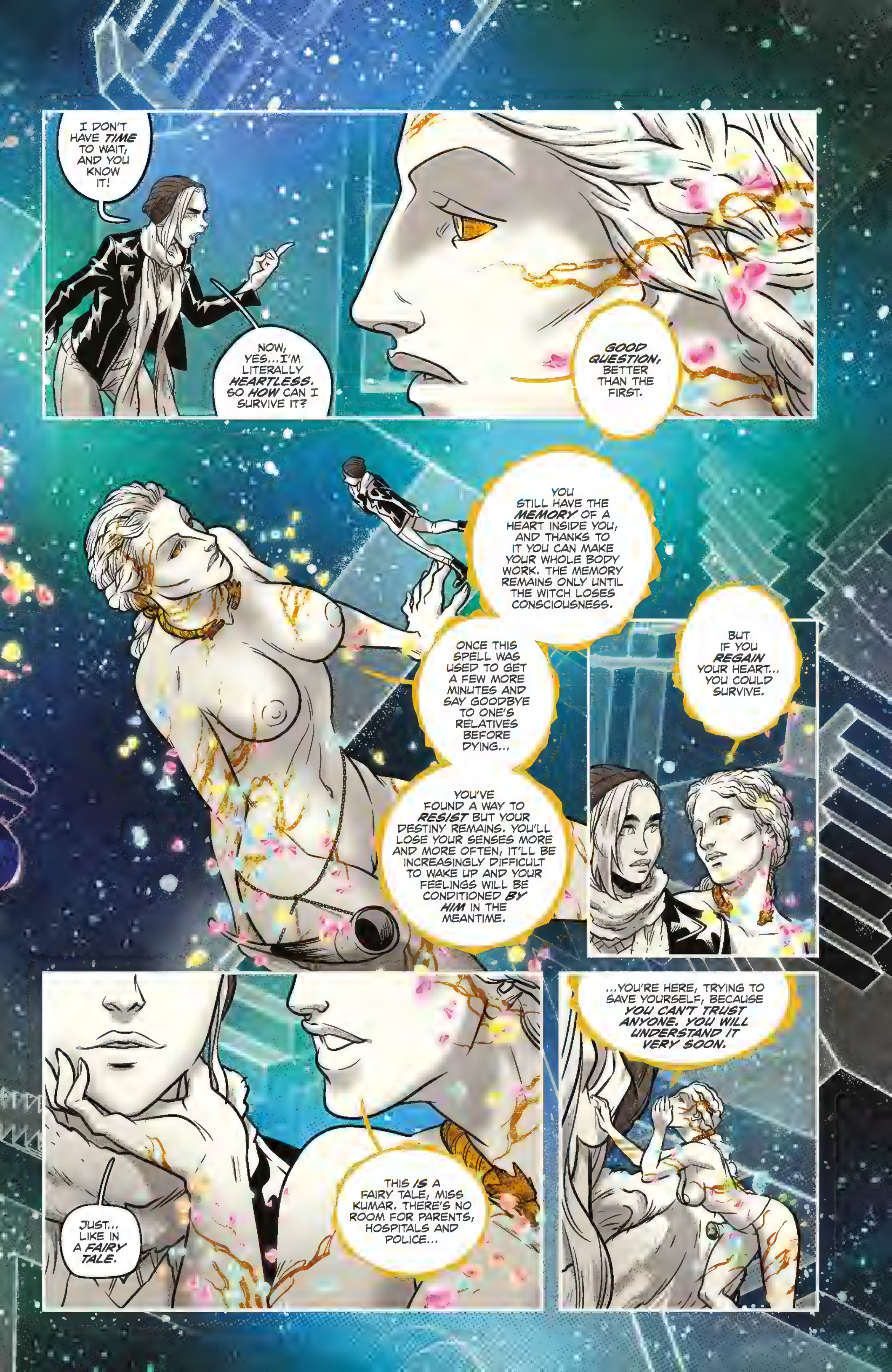

AND I DON'T KNOW HOW TO DESCRIBE IT...

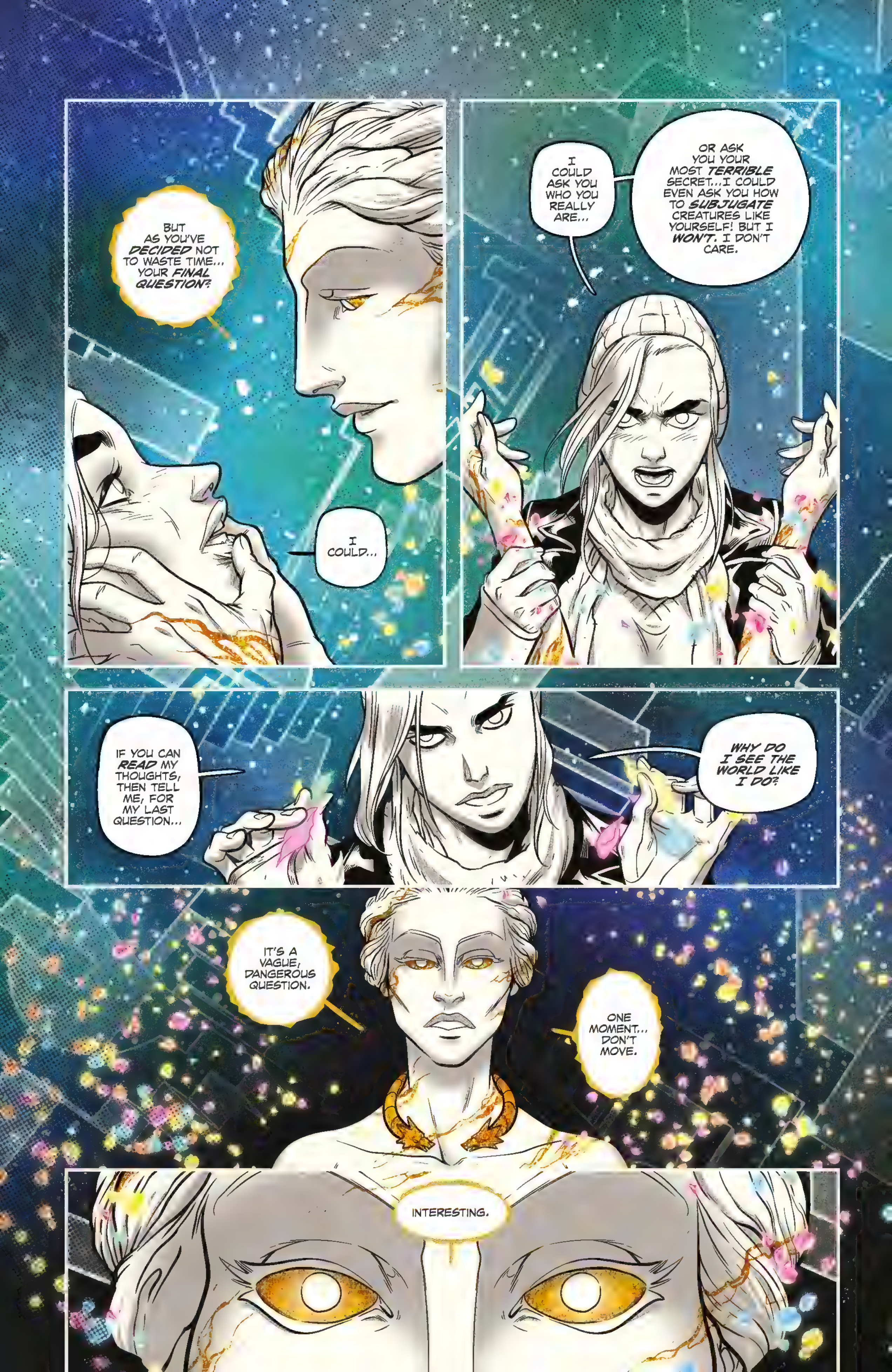

ANNA, SLOW DOWN.
LEAH... WAIT FOR YOUR SISTER.
MATT... STOP *HIDING*.
ARE... YOU *SURE* YOU'RE FEELING OKAY?
I FOUND HER.

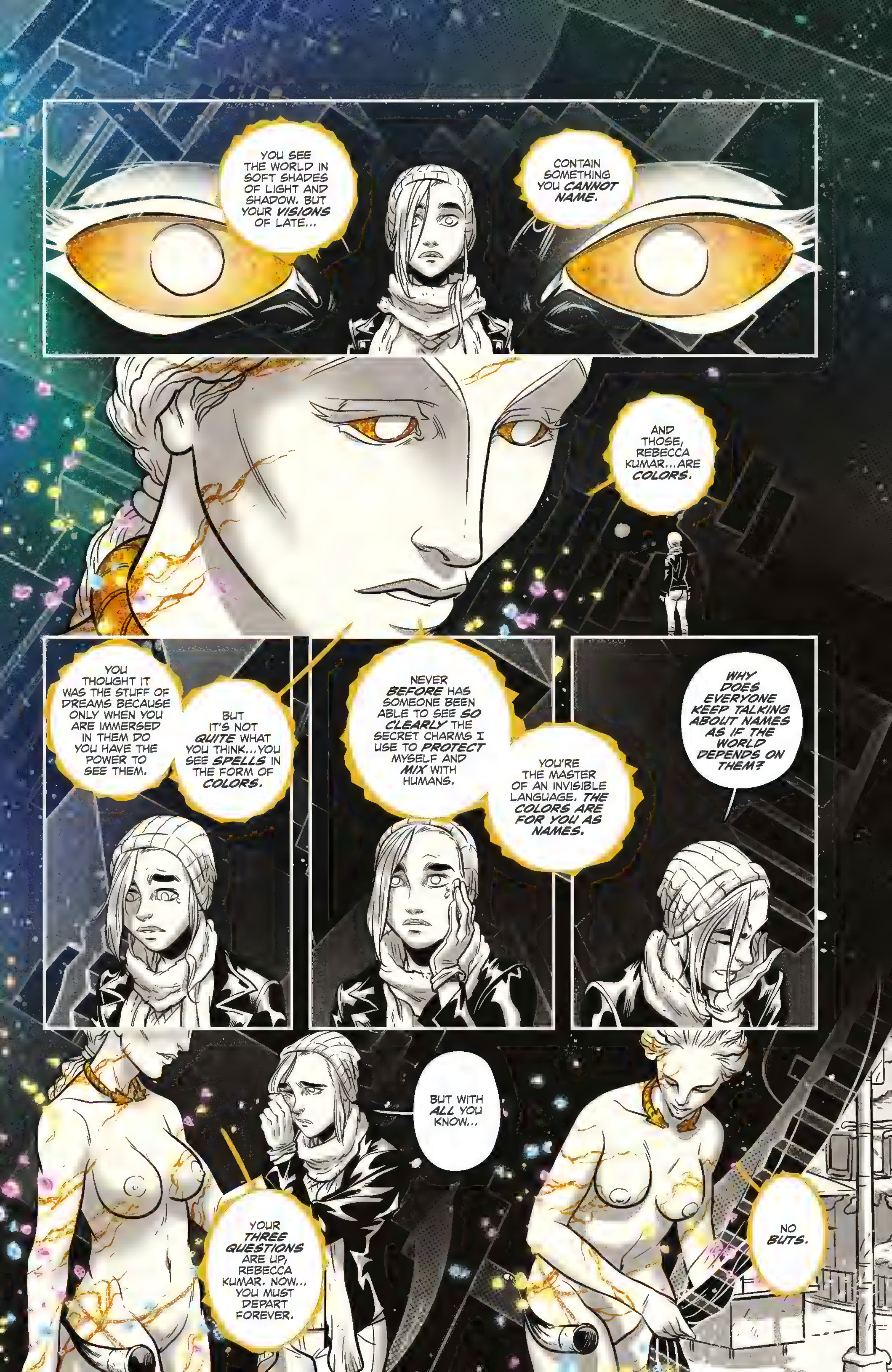

YOU'RE... SCARING ME.
DON'T WORRY...I'LL SEE YOU AT THE STARBUCKS ON THE CORNER.
BUT DHARA...
SHE'LL BE *FINE*. I'LL BE *FAST*.
WHIP
EXCUSE ME, MISS LETHDERG?
YES? ...HAVE WE MET BEFORE?
UNFORTUNATELY NO, THE LADY... *MACBETH* GAVE ME YOUR CONTACT.
OH. I UNDERSTAND.
IT'S...A *BEAUTIFUL* DAY. LET'S MAYBE...TAKE A WALK IN MORNINGSIDE PARK.
MACBETH. I HAVEN'T HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH *HER* KIND SINCE THE MORNING OF SEPTEMBER 11TH.
Morningside
W 116 St
THAT SEPTEMBER 11TH? I...HAVE TO ASSUME THERE'S A *STORY* THERE.

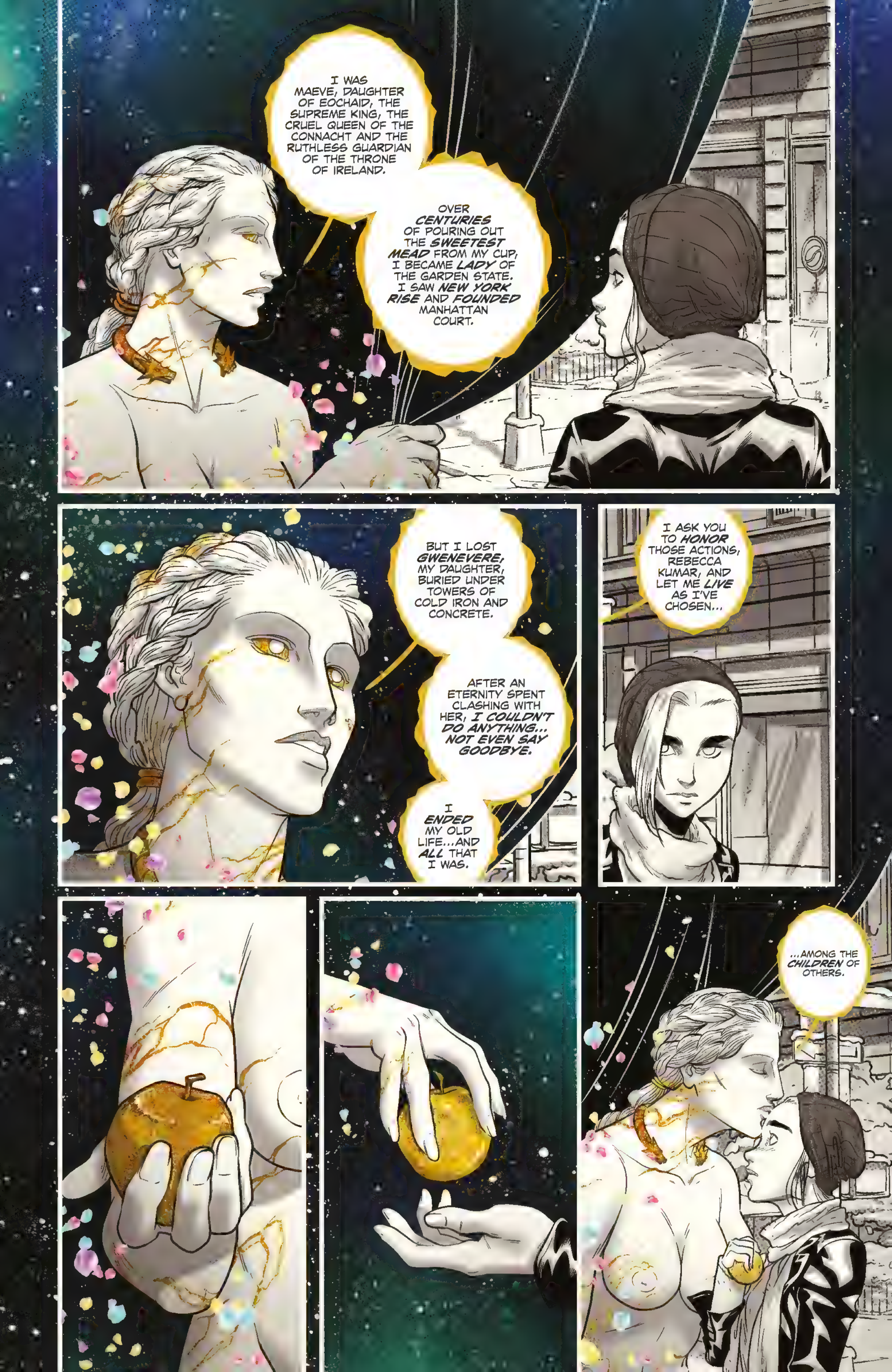

YOU ASSUME CORRECTLY. I LOST MY DAUGHTER TO THE ATTACK, AND I SWORE THEN AND THERE I WOULD NEVER AGAIN DEAL WITH THE PEOPLE THAT SENT YOU TO ME.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO SAY ANYTHING, MISS KUMAR.
RIGHT NOW, YOU FEEL EMBARRASSED. YOU TOO HAVE LOST SOMEONE RECENTLY AND KNOW THERE ARE NO RIGHT WORDS... EVERYTHING IS WRONG. EVERYTHING HURTS.
HOW DO YOU KNOW?
BECAUSE RIGHT NOW, I'M READING YOUR THOUGHTS, THE ONES THAT FLOAT ON THE SURFACE OF YOUR SKIN. I HAD TO BE SURE YOU WEREN'T AN EMISSARY.
YOU COULD'VE ASKED ME.
THE TRUTH IS NO SLAVE TO WORDS.
BUT YES, MAYBE I WAS RUDE... I ALWAYS DID RESPECT THE WOMEN OF YOUR PEOPLE. THE WITCHES.
I WILL GRANT YOU THREE QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED WITHOUT HESITATION. AFTER THAT, YOU MUST LEAVE ME AND NEVER RETURN.

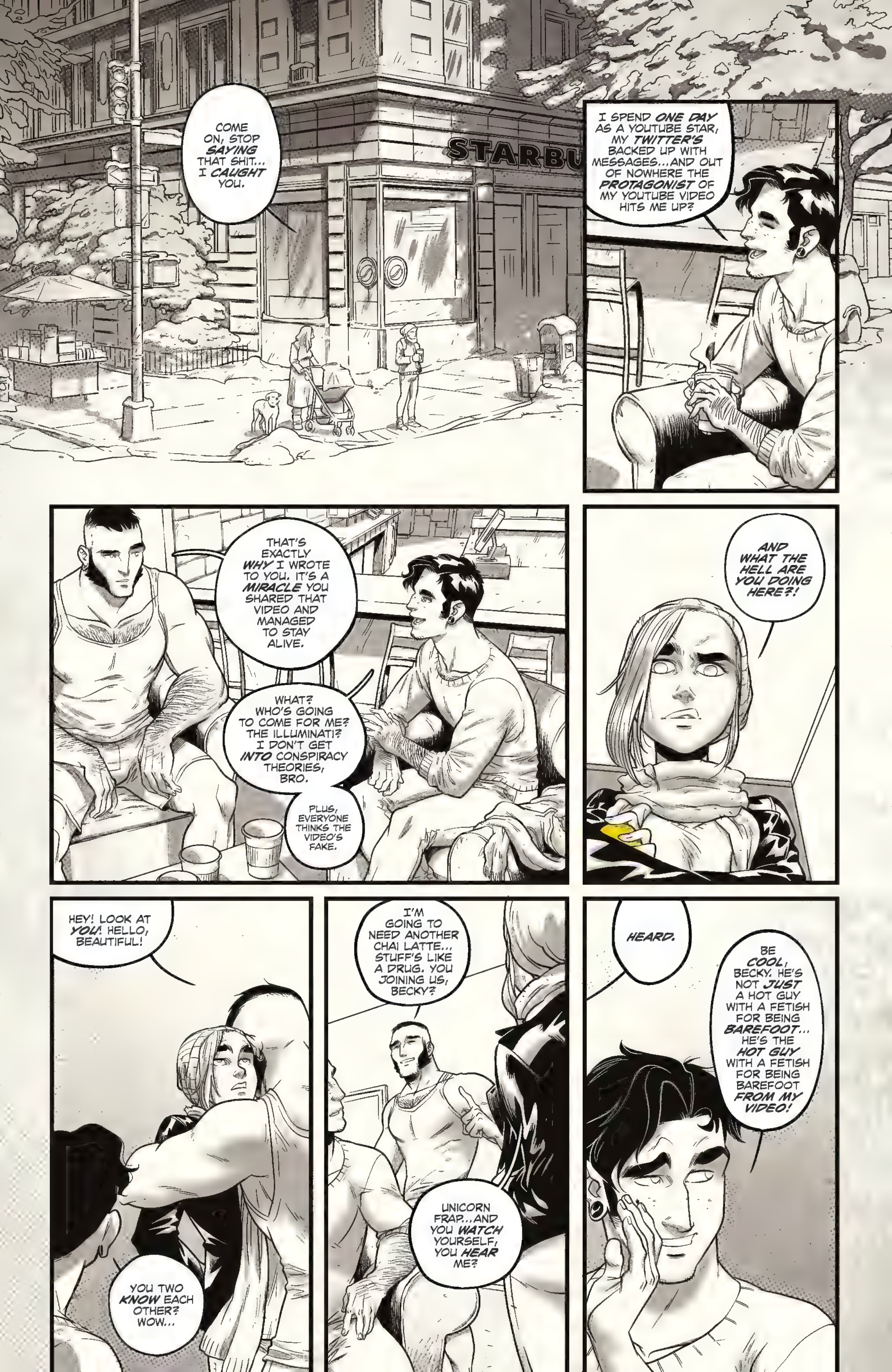

I KNOW THIS GAME... *I'M IN.*
WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE KING OF THIS LAND?
TLACK
THE *KING* IS NAMED *TARANIS.* THE RAVEN STÜRM-DRAGON. HE IS A CUNNING CICISBEO FROM THE LINE OF *BANSHEES* THAT STOLE MY CROWN FOR HIMSELF.
HE'S A FAIRY CREATURE LINKED TO DEATH, DANCES AND DESIRES. UNDERESTIMATING HIM WAS A MISTAKE THAT THE WHOLE KINGDOM PAID FOR WITH BLOOD.
TARANIS IS A *TRADITIONALIST.* FOR HIM WE'RE NOT *STORIES*, WE'RE *FAIRIES.* HE FORCES HIS SUBJECTS TO DANCE EVERY NIGHT, TO KIDNAP HUMAN CHILDREN, AND TO CLOSE AN EYE ON HIS HUNT...
HE... TARANIS TOOK *MY* HEART.
THAT MUCH IS *OBVIOUS.*
...FOR *HEARTS.*
WOOOOO
FOR YOUR *NEXT* QUESTION... MAY I SUGGEST YOU WAIT? WHY *RUSH?*
THINK LONG. I CAN ANSWER *ANY* QUESTION, ANY MYSTERY THAT'S PLAGUED HUMANITY FROM THE START.

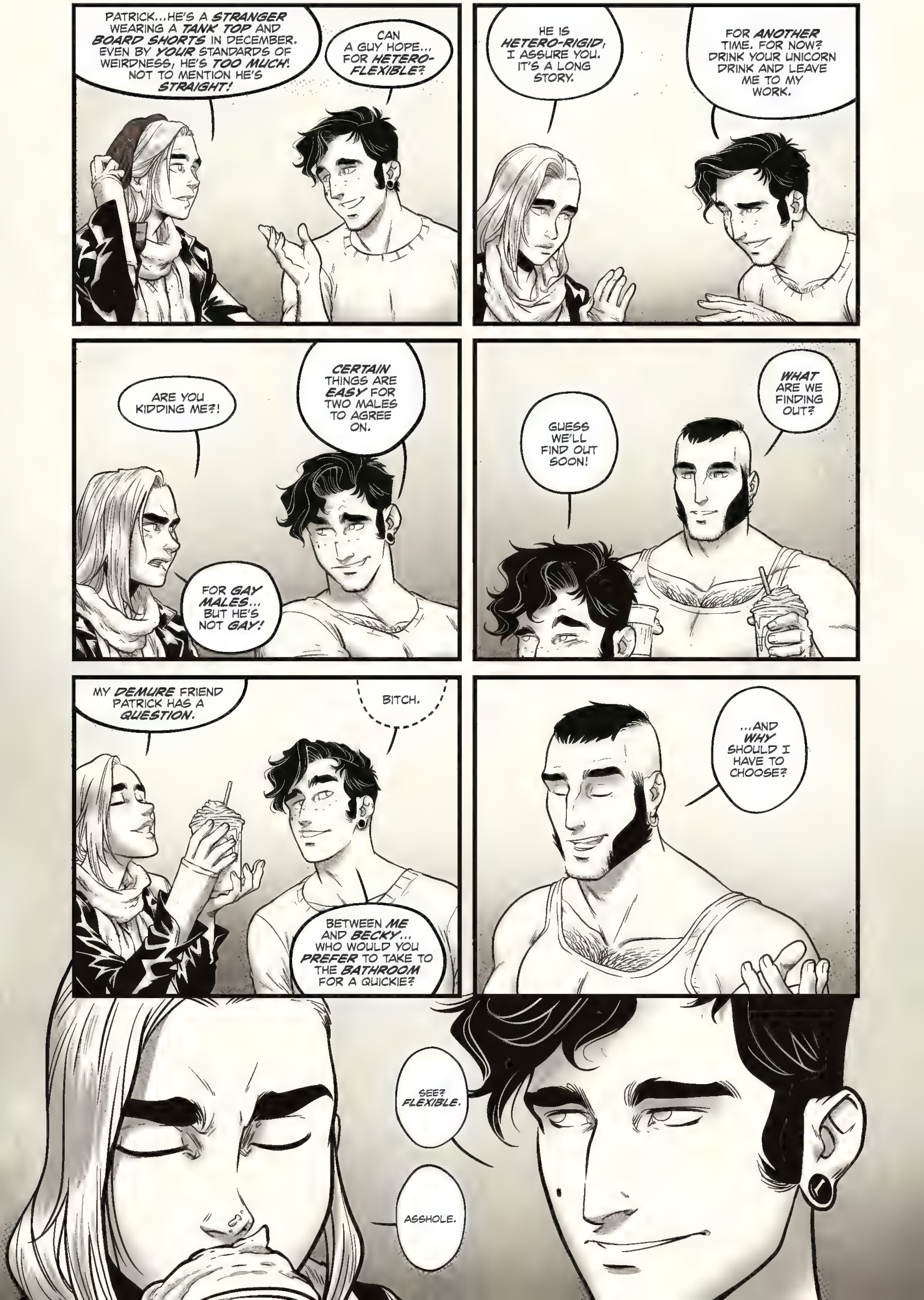

I DON'T HAVE *TIME* TO WAIT, AND YOU KNOW IT!
NOW, YES... I'M LITERALLY *HEARTLESS*. SO *HOW* CAN I SURVIVE IT?
GOOD QUESTION, BETTER THAN THE FIRST.
YOU STILL HAVE THE *MEMORY* OF A HEART INSIDE YOU, AND THANKS TO IT YOU CAN MAKE YOUR WHOLE BODY WORK. THE MEMORY REMAINS ONLY UNTIL THE WITCH LOSES CONSCIOUSNESS.
ONCE THIS SPELL WAS USED TO GET A FEW MORE MINUTES AND SAY GOODBYE TO ONE'S RELATIVES BEFORE DYING...
YOU'VE FOUND A WAY TO *RESIST* BUT YOUR DESTINY REMAINS. YOU'LL LOSE YOUR SENSES MORE AND MORE OFTEN, IT'LL BE INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO WAKE UP AND YOUR FEELINGS WILL BE CONDITIONED *BY HIM* IN THE MEANTIME.
BUT IF YOU *REGAIN* YOUR HEART... YOU COULD SURVIVE.
JUST... LIKE IN A *FAIRY TALE*.
THIS *IS* A FAIRY TALE, MISS KUMAR. THERE'S NO ROOM FOR PARENTS, HOSPITALS AND POLICE...
...YOU'RE HERE, TRYING TO SAVE YOURSELF, BECAUSE *YOU CAN'T TRUST ANYONE. YOU WILL UNDERSTAND IT VERY SOON.*


BUT AS YOU'VE *DECIDED* NOT TO WASTE TIME... YOUR *FINAL QUESTION*?
I COULD...
I COULD ASK YOU WHO YOU REALLY ARE...
OR ASK YOU YOUR MOST *TERRIBLE* SECRET...I COULD EVEN ASK YOU HOW TO *SUBJUGATE* CREATURES LIKE YOURSELF! BUT I *WON'T*. I DON'T CARE.
IF YOU CAN *READ* MY THOUGHTS, THEN TELL ME, FOR MY LAST QUESTION...
WHY DO I SEE THE WORLD LIKE I DO?
IT'S A VAGUE, DANGEROUS QUESTION.
ONE MOMENT... DON'T MOVE.
INTERESTING.

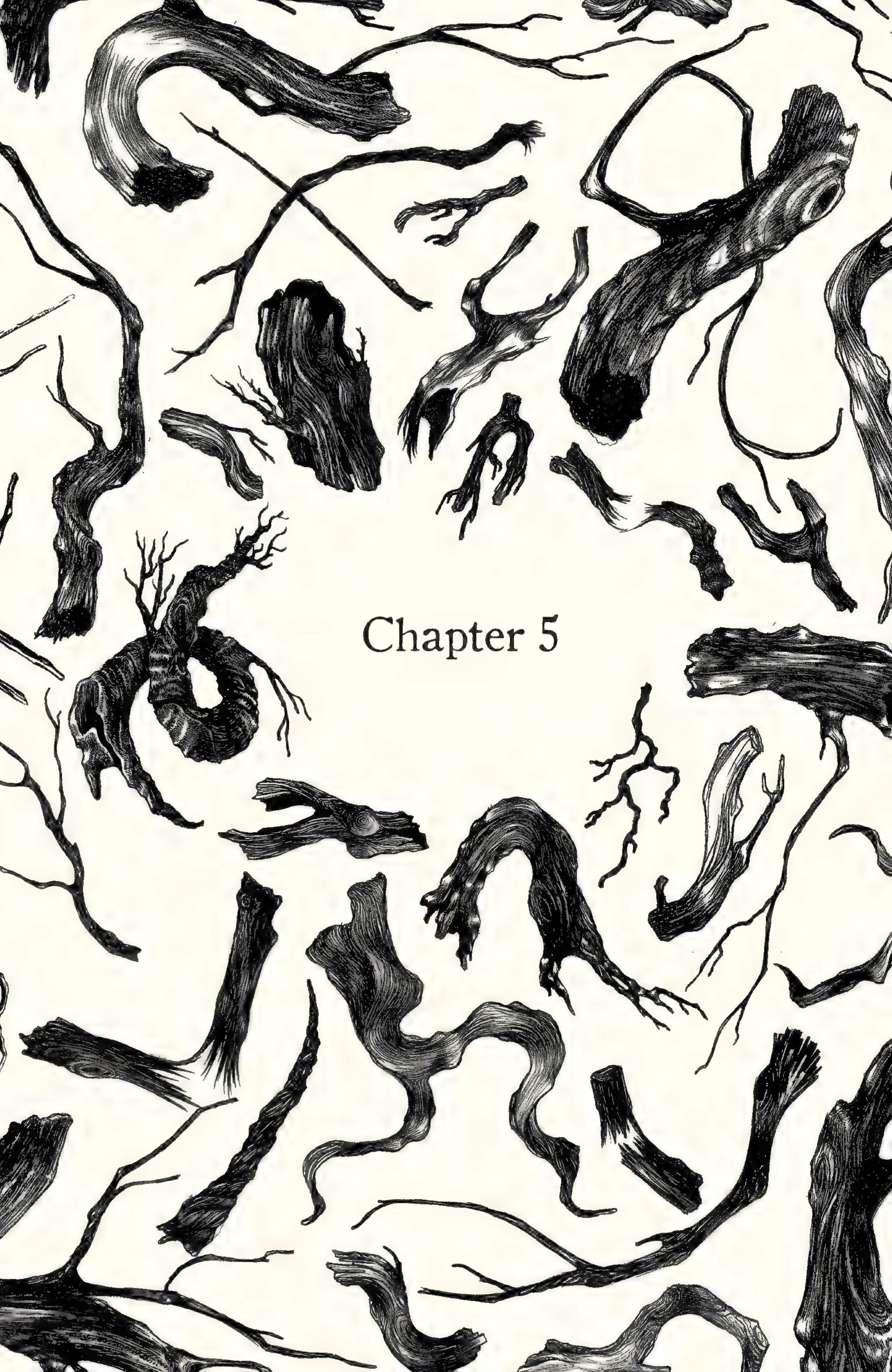

YOU SEE THE WORLD IN SOFT SHADES OF LIGHT AND SHADOW. BUT YOUR *VISIONS* OF LATE...
CONTAIN SOMETHING YOU *CANNOT NAME.*
AND THOSE, REBECCA KUMAR...ARE *COLORS.*
YOU THOUGHT IT WAS THE STUFF OF DREAMS BECAUSE ONLY WHEN YOU ARE IMMERSED IN THEM DO YOU HAVE THE POWER TO SEE THEM.
BUT IT'S NOT *QUITE* WHAT YOU THINK...YOU SEE *SPELLS* IN THE FORM OF *COLORS.*
NEVER *BEFORE* HAS SOMEONE BEEN ABLE TO SEE *SO CLEARLY* THE SECRET CHARMS I USE TO *PROTECT* MYSELF AND *MIX* WITH HUMANS.
YOU'RE THE MASTER OF AN INVISIBLE LANGUAGE. *THE COLORS ARE FOR YOU AS NAMES.*
WHY DOES EVERYONE KEEP TALKING ABOUT NAMES AS IF THE WORLD DEPENDS ON THEM?
BUT WITH *ALL* YOU KNOW...
YOUR *THREE QUESTIONS* ARE UP, REBECCA KUMAR. NOW... YOU MUST DEPART FOREVER.
NO *BUTS.*

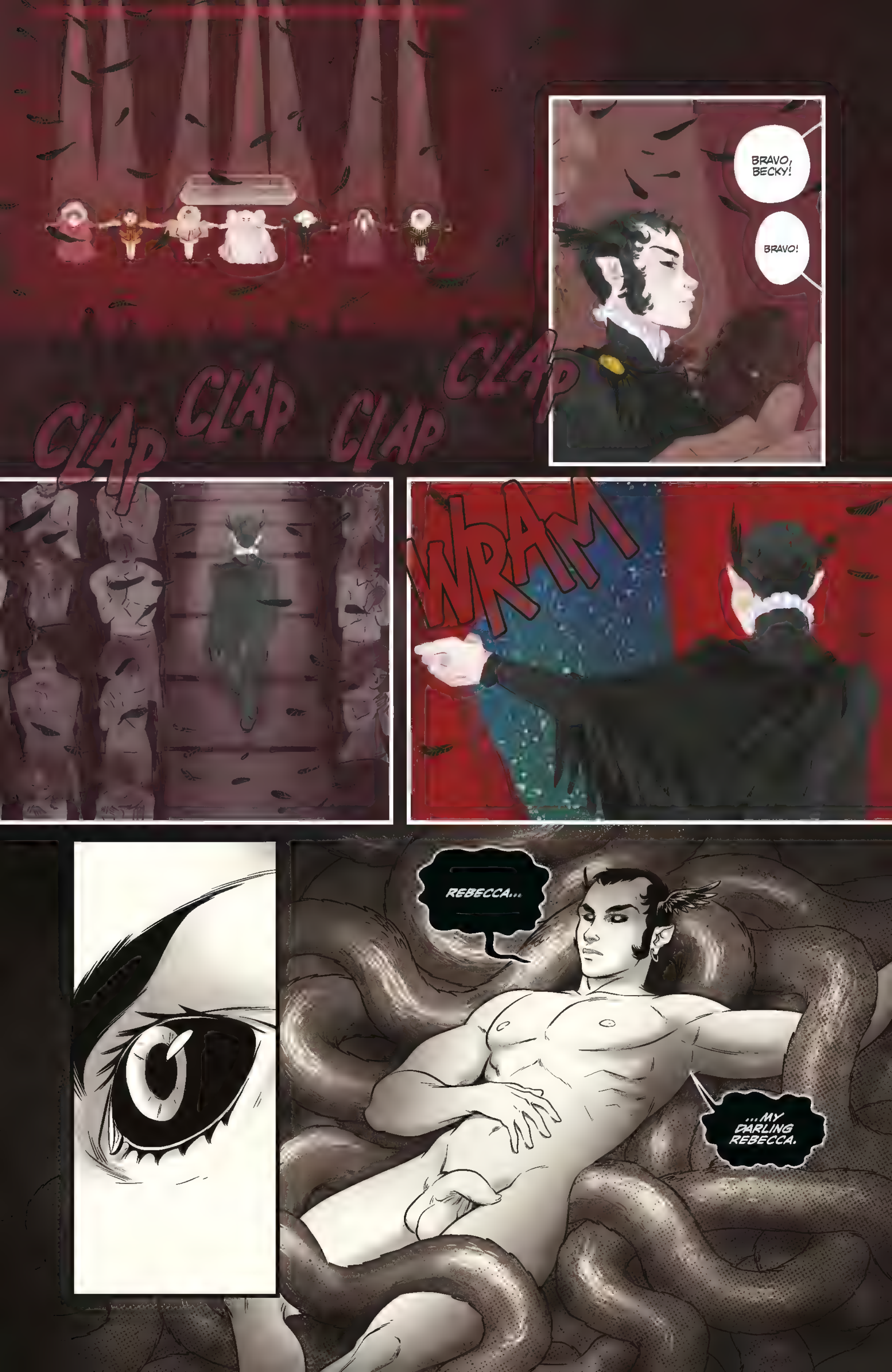

I WAS MAEVE, DAUGHTER OF EOCHAID, THE SUPREME KING, THE CRUEL QUEEN OF THE CONNACHT AND THE RUTHLESS GUARDIAN OF THE THRONE OF IRELAND.
OVER *CENTURIES* OF POURING OUT THE *SWEETEST MEAD* FROM MY CUP, I BECAME *LADY* OF THE GARDEN STATE. I SAW *NEW YORK RISE* AND *FOUNDED* MANHATTAN COURT.
BUT I LOST *GWENEVERE,* MY DAUGHTER, BURIED UNDER TOWERS OF COLD IRON AND CONCRETE.
AFTER AN ETERNITY SPENT CLASHING WITH HER, *I COULDN'T DO ANYTHING... NOT EVEN SAY GOODBYE.*
I *ENDED* MY OLD LIFE...AND *ALL* THAT I WAS.
I ASK YOU TO *HONOR* THOSE ACTIONS, REBECCA KUMAR, AND LET ME *LIVE* AS I'VE CHOSEN...
...AMONG THE *CHILDREN* OF OTHERS.

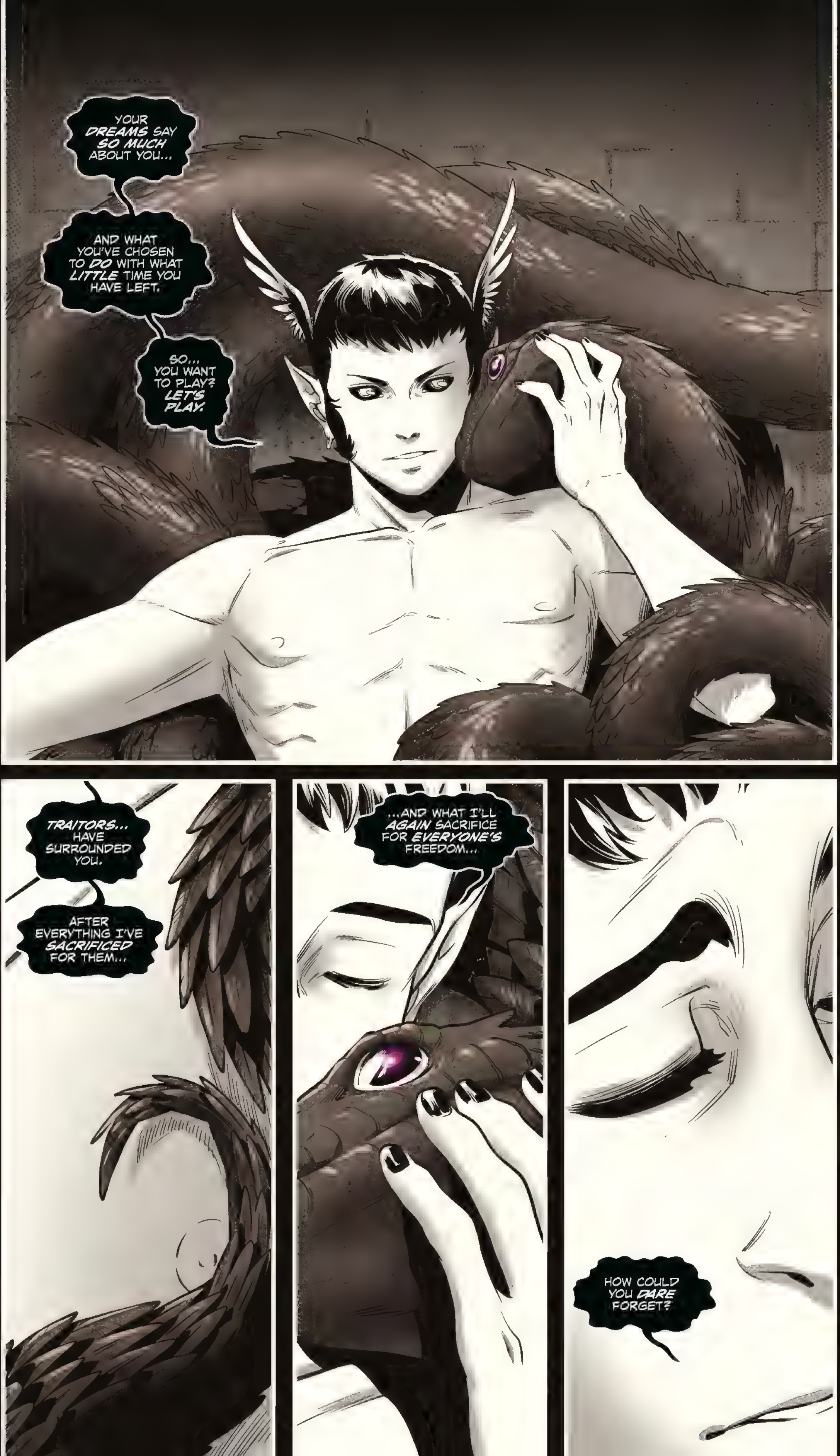

COME ON, STOP *SAYING* THAT SHIT... I *CAUGHT* YOU.
STARBU
I SPEND *ONE DAY* AS A YOUTUBE STAR, MY *TWITTER'S* BACKED UP WITH MESSAGES...AND OUT OF NOWHERE THE *PROTAGONIST* OF MY YOUTUBE VIDEO HITS ME UP?
THAT'S EXACTLY *WHY* I WROTE TO YOU. IT'S A *MIRACLE* YOU SHARED THAT VIDEO AND MANAGED TO STAY ALIVE.
WHAT? WHO'S GOING TO COME FOR ME? THE ILLUMINATI? I DON'T GET *INTO* CONSPIRACY THEORIES, BRO.
PLUS, EVERYONE THINKS THE VIDEO'S FAKE.
AND WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING HERE?!
HEY! LOOK AT *YOU*! HELLO, BEAUTIFUL!
YOU TWO *KNOW* EACH OTHER? WOW...
I'M GOING TO NEED ANOTHER CHAI LATTE... STUFF'S LIKE A DRUG. YOU JOINING US, BECKY?
UNICORN FRAP...AND YOU *WATCH* YOURSELF, YOU *HEAR* ME?
HEARD.
BE *COOL*, BECKY. HE'S NOT *JUST* A HOT GUY WITH A FETISH FOR BEING *BAREFOOT*... HE'S THE *HOT GUY* WITH A FETISH FOR BEING BAREFOOT *FROM MY VIDEO!*

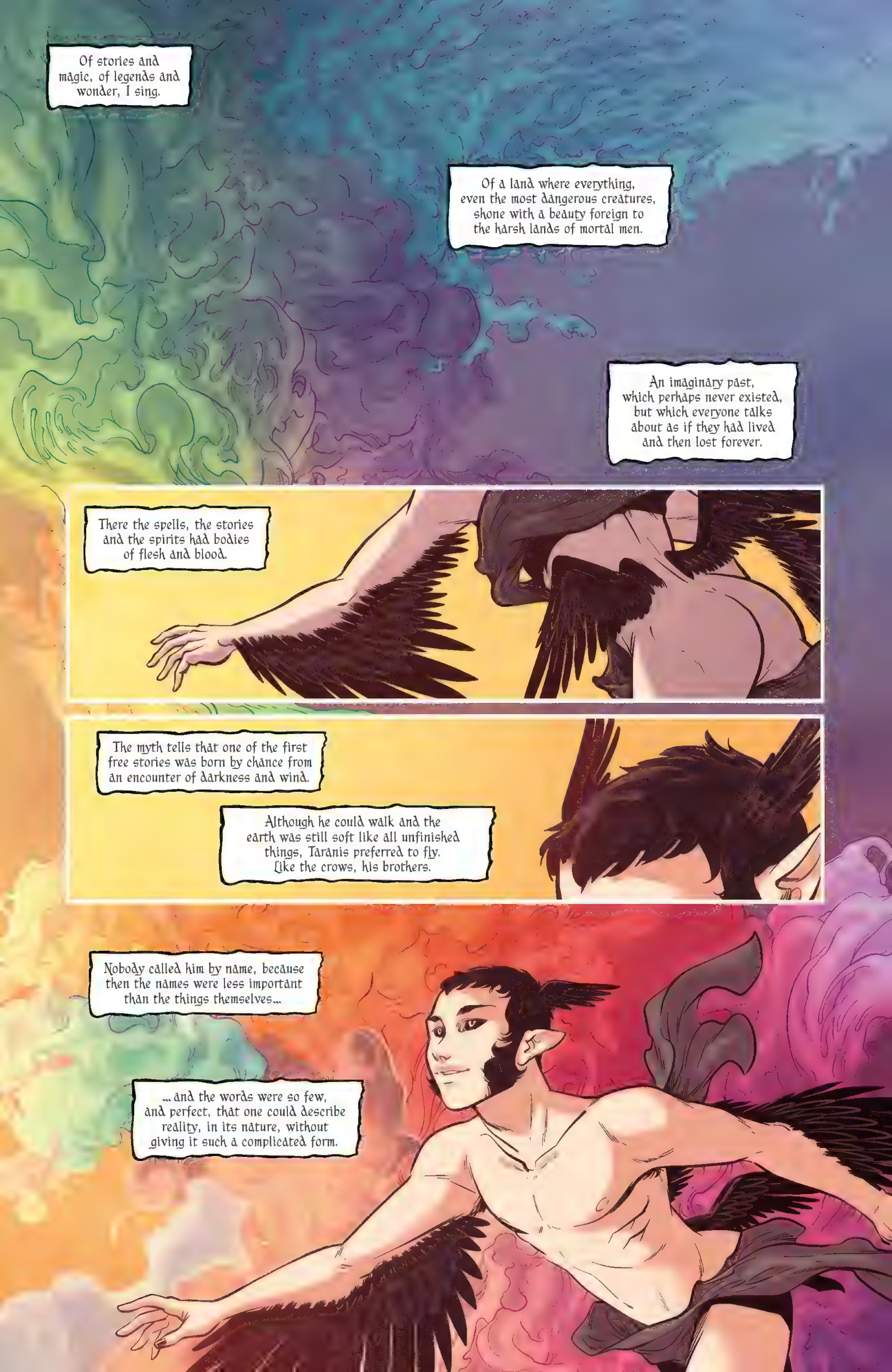

PATRICK...HE'S A **STRANGER** WEARING A **TANK TOP** AND **BOARD SHORTS** IN DECEMBER. EVEN BY **YOUR** STANDARDS OF WEIRDNESS, HE'S **TOO MUCH**! NOT TO MENTION HE'S **STRAIGHT!**
CAN A GUY HOPE... FOR **HETERO-FLEXIBLE**?
HE IS **HETERO-RIGID**, I ASSURE YOU. IT'S A LONG STORY.
FOR **ANOTHER** TIME. FOR NOW? DRINK YOUR UNICORN DRINK AND LEAVE ME TO MY WORK.
ARE YOU KIDDING ME?!
CERTAIN THINGS ARE **EASY** FOR TWO MALES TO AGREE ON.
FOR **GAY MALES**... BUT HE'S NOT **GAY!**
GUESS WE'LL FIND OUT SOON!
WHAT ARE WE FINDING OUT?
MY **DEMURE** FRIEND PATRICK HAS A **QUESTION**.
BITCH.
BETWEEN **ME** AND **BECKY**... WHO WOULD YOU **PREFER** TO TAKE TO THE **BATHROOM** FOR A QUICKIE?
...AND **WHY** SHOULD I HAVE TO CHOOSE?
SEE? **FLEXIBLE**.
ASSHOLE.

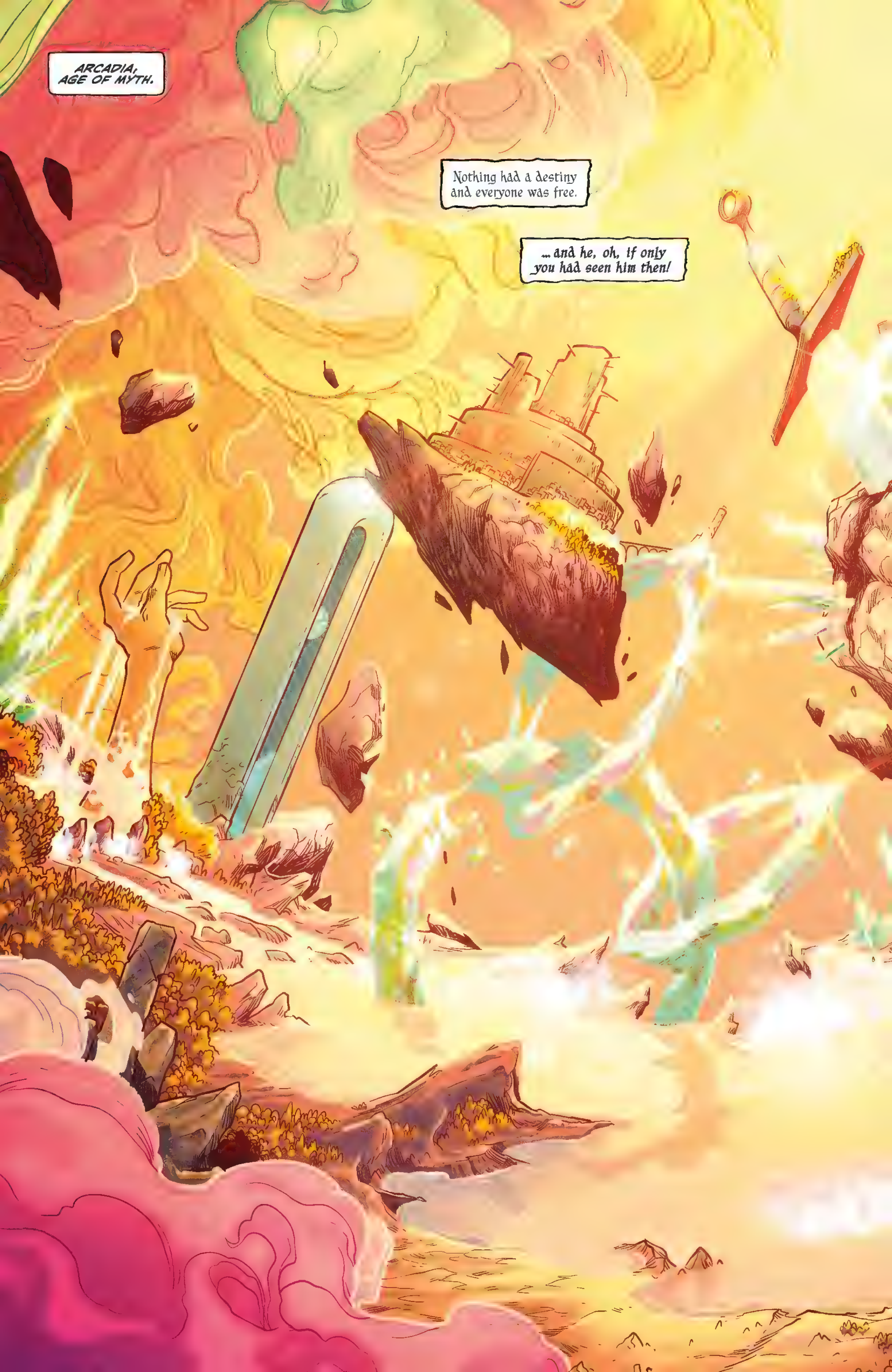
Chapter 5

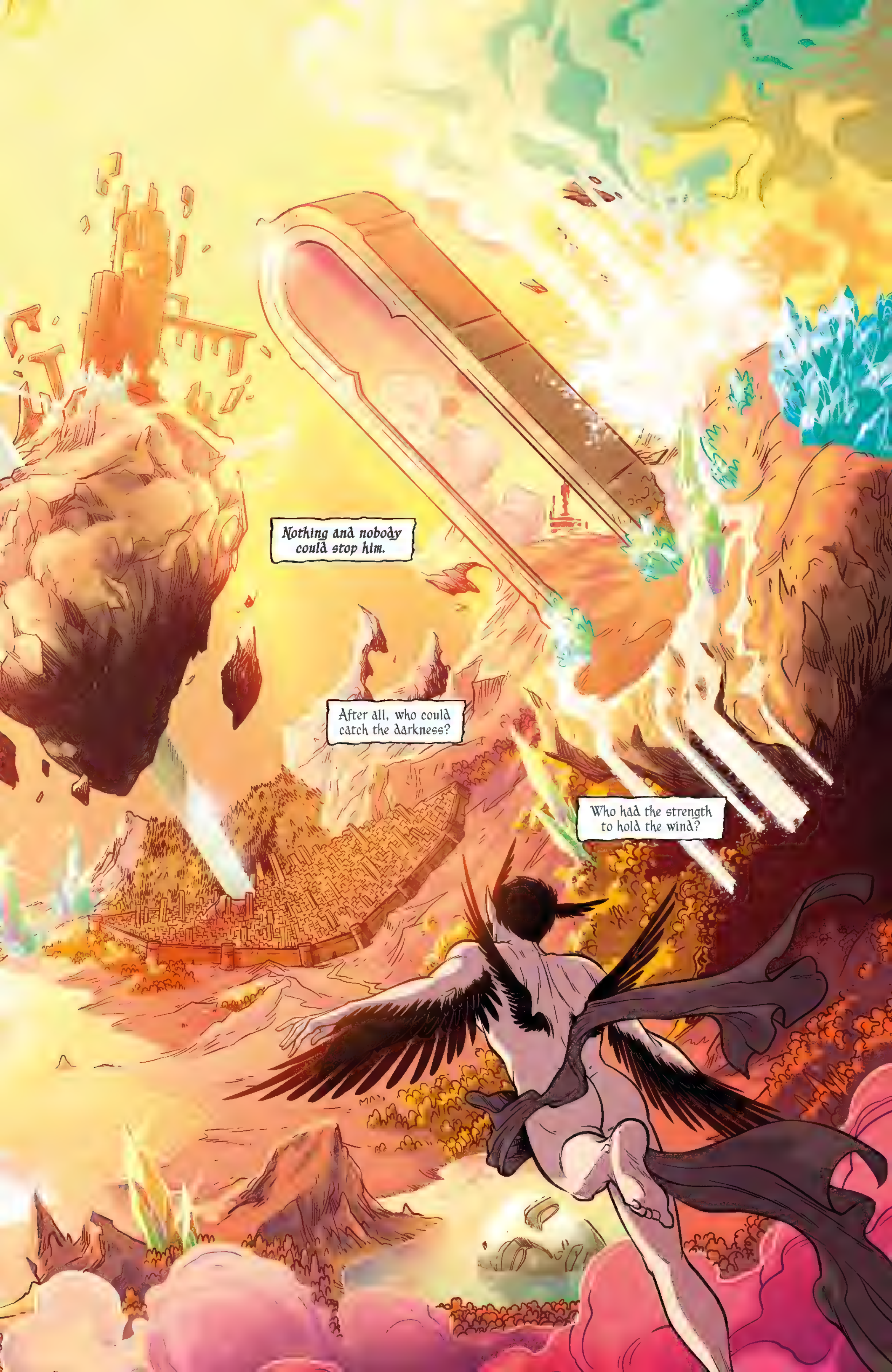


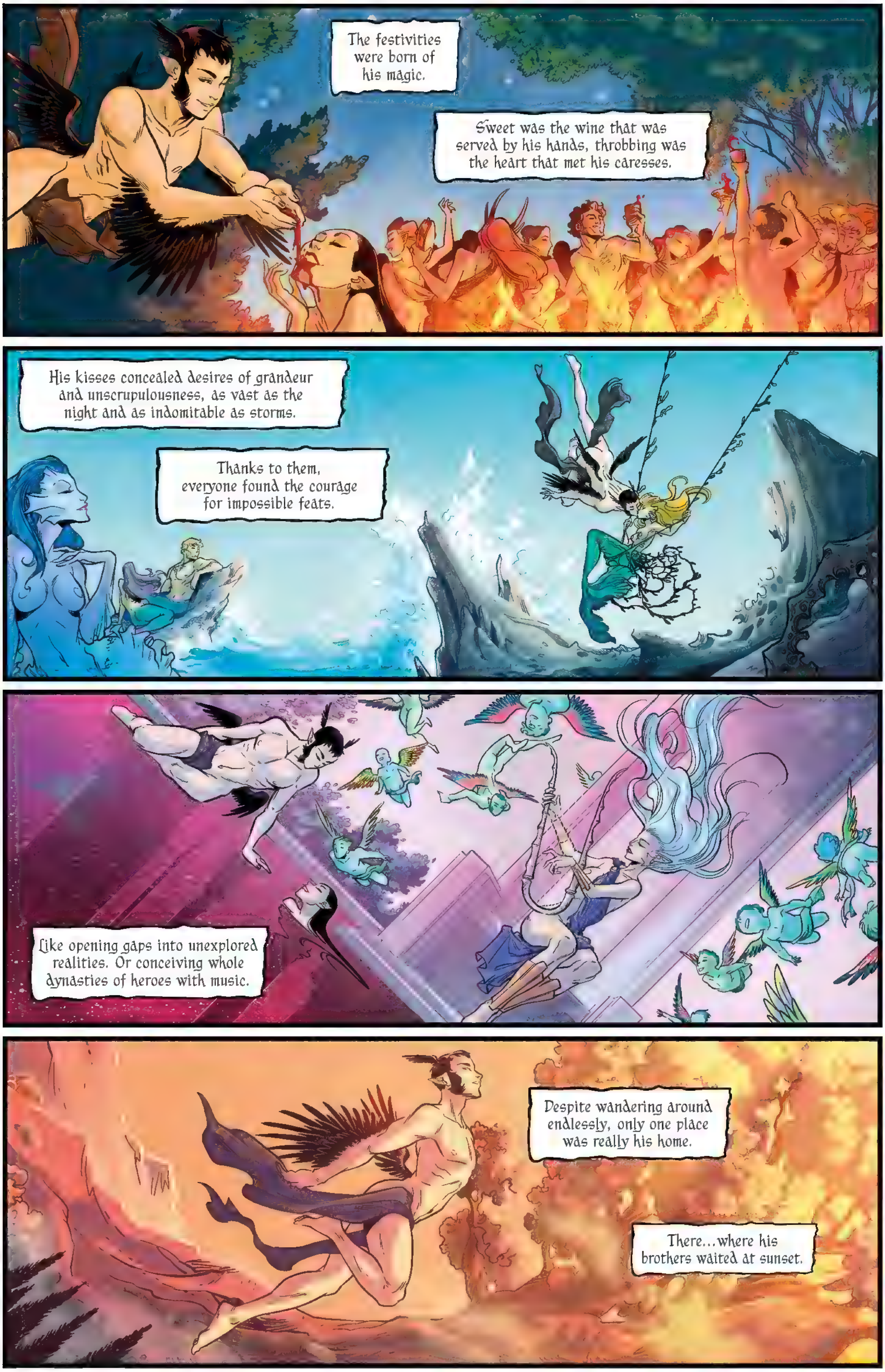

CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
CLAP
BRAVO, BECKY!
BRAVO!
WRAM
REBECCA...
...MY DARLING REBECCA.

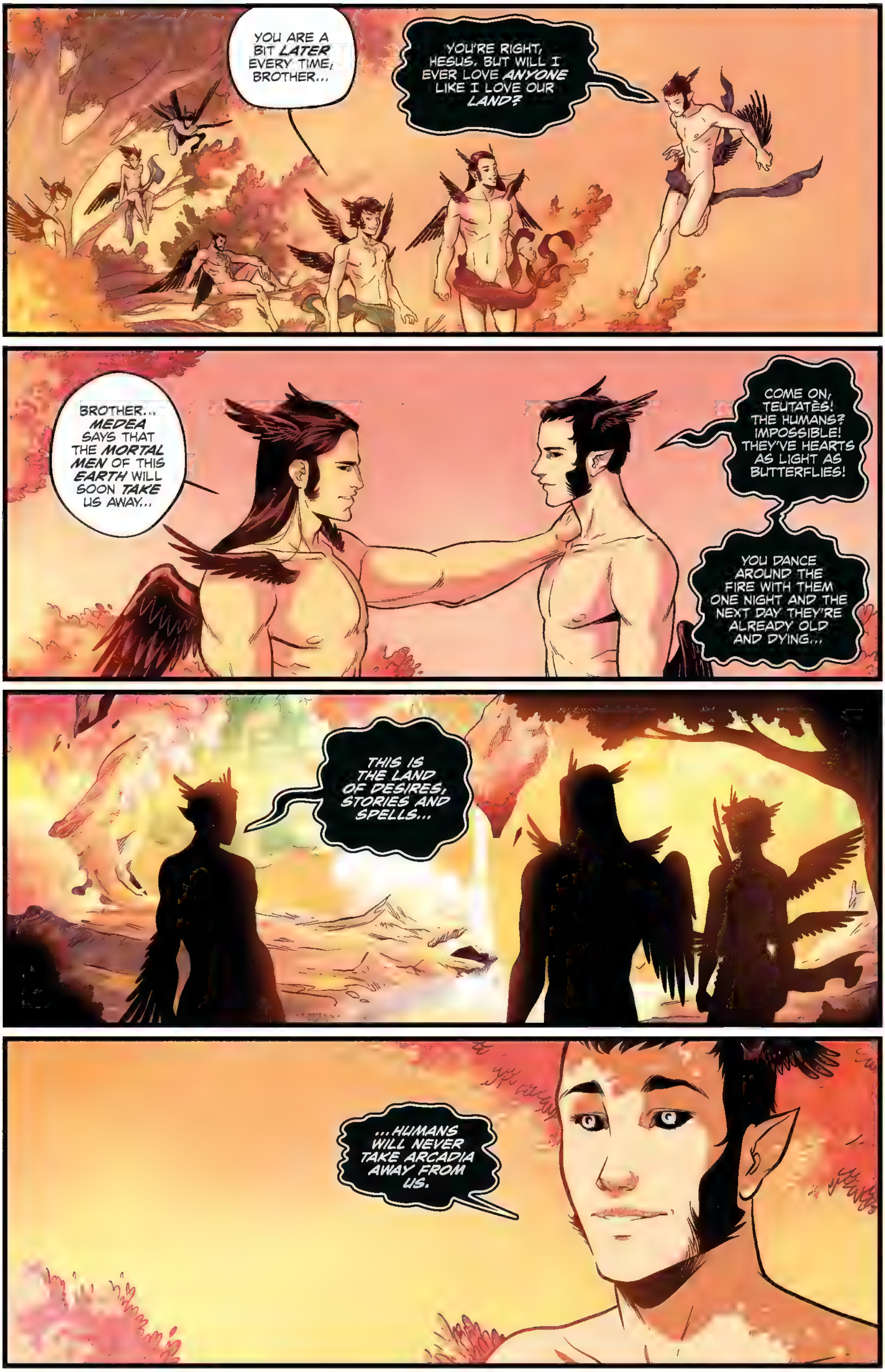

YOUR *DREAMS* SAY *SO MUCH* ABOUT YOU...
AND WHAT YOU'VE CHOSEN TO *DO* WITH WHAT *LITTLE* TIME YOU HAVE LEFT.
SO... YOU WANT TO PLAY? *LET'S PLAY.*
TRAITORS... HAVE SURROUNDED YOU.
AFTER EVERYTHING I'VE *SACRIFICED* FOR THEM...
...AND WHAT I'LL *AGAIN* SACRIFICE FOR *EVERYONE'S* FREEDOM...
HOW COULD YOU *DARE* FORGET?

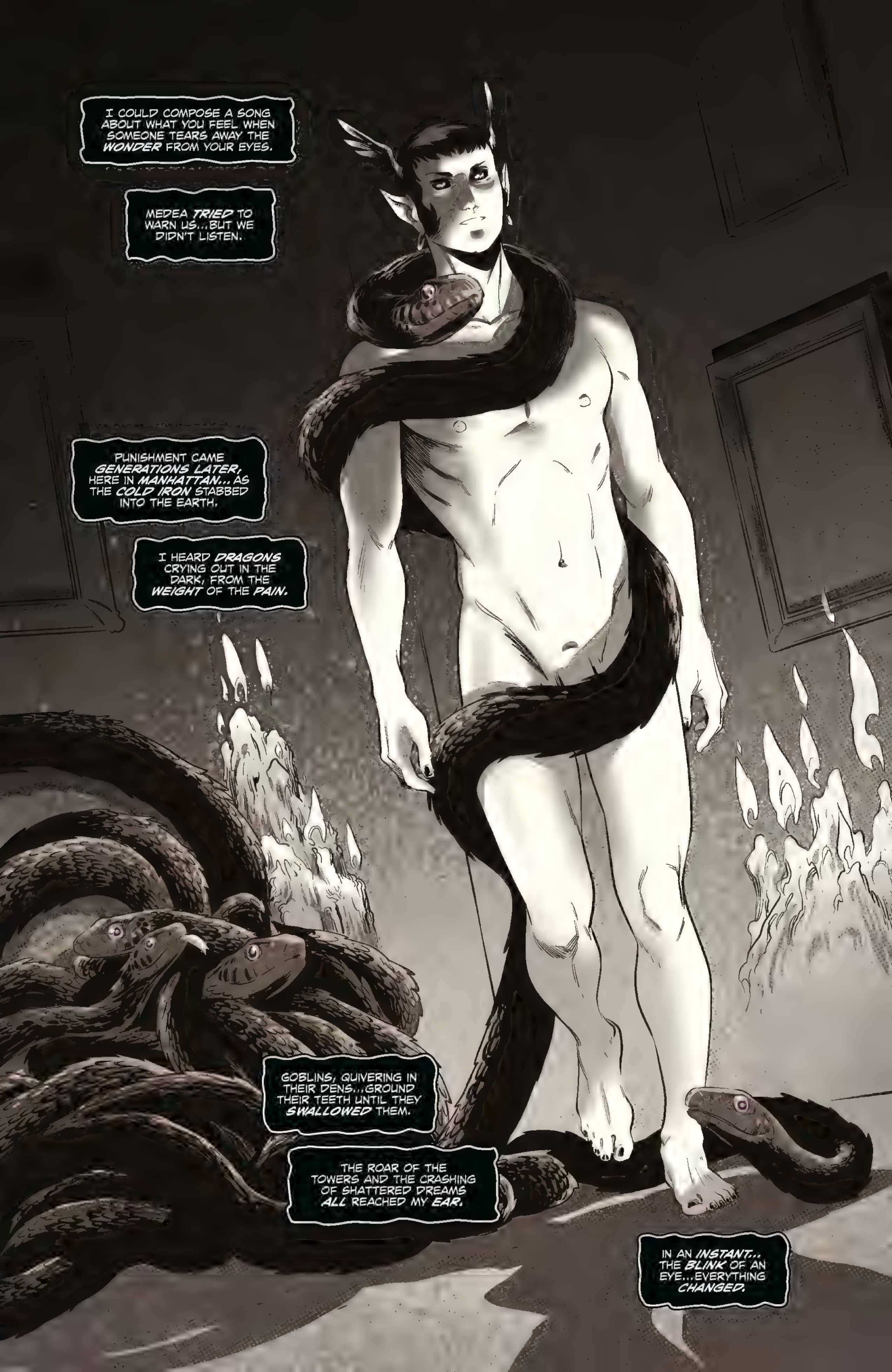

Of stories and magic, of legends and wonder, I sing.
Of a land where everything, even the most dangerous creatures, shone with a beauty foreign to the harsh lands of mortal men.
An imaginary past, which perhaps never existed, but which everyone talks about as if they had lived and then lost forever.
There the spells, the stories and the spirits had bodies of flesh and blood.
The myth tells that one of the first free stories was born by chance from an encounter of darkness and wind.
Although he could walk and the earth was still soft like all unfinished things, Taranis preferred to fly. Like the crows, his brothers.
Nobody called him by name, because then the names were less important than the things themselves...
...and the words were so few, and perfect, that one could describe reality, in its nature, without giving it such a complicated form.

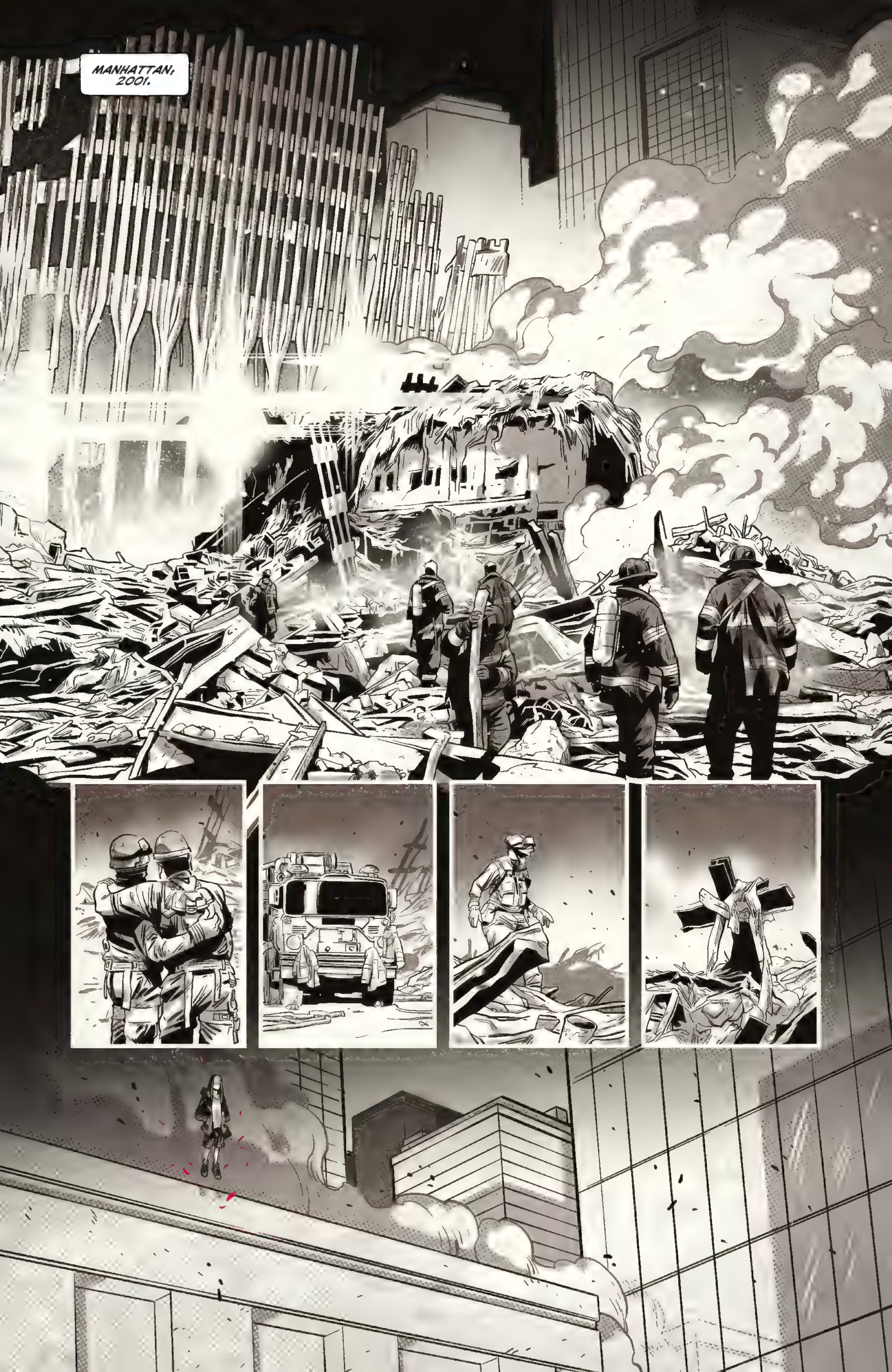

ARCADIA, AGE OF MYTH.
Nothing had a destiny and everyone was free.
...and he, oh, if only you had seen him then!

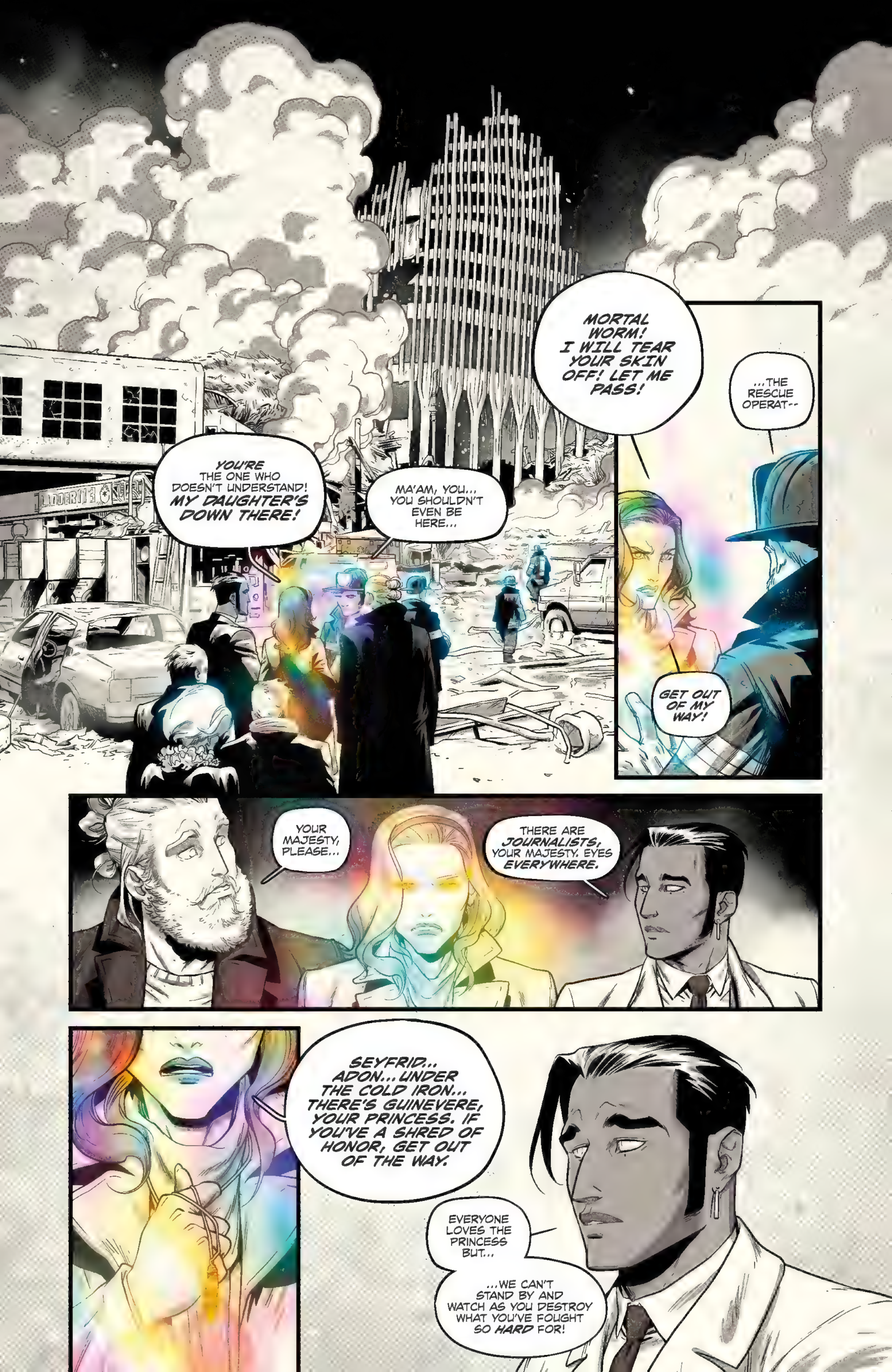

Nothing and nobody could stop him.
After all, who could catch the darkness?
Who had the strength to hold the wind?

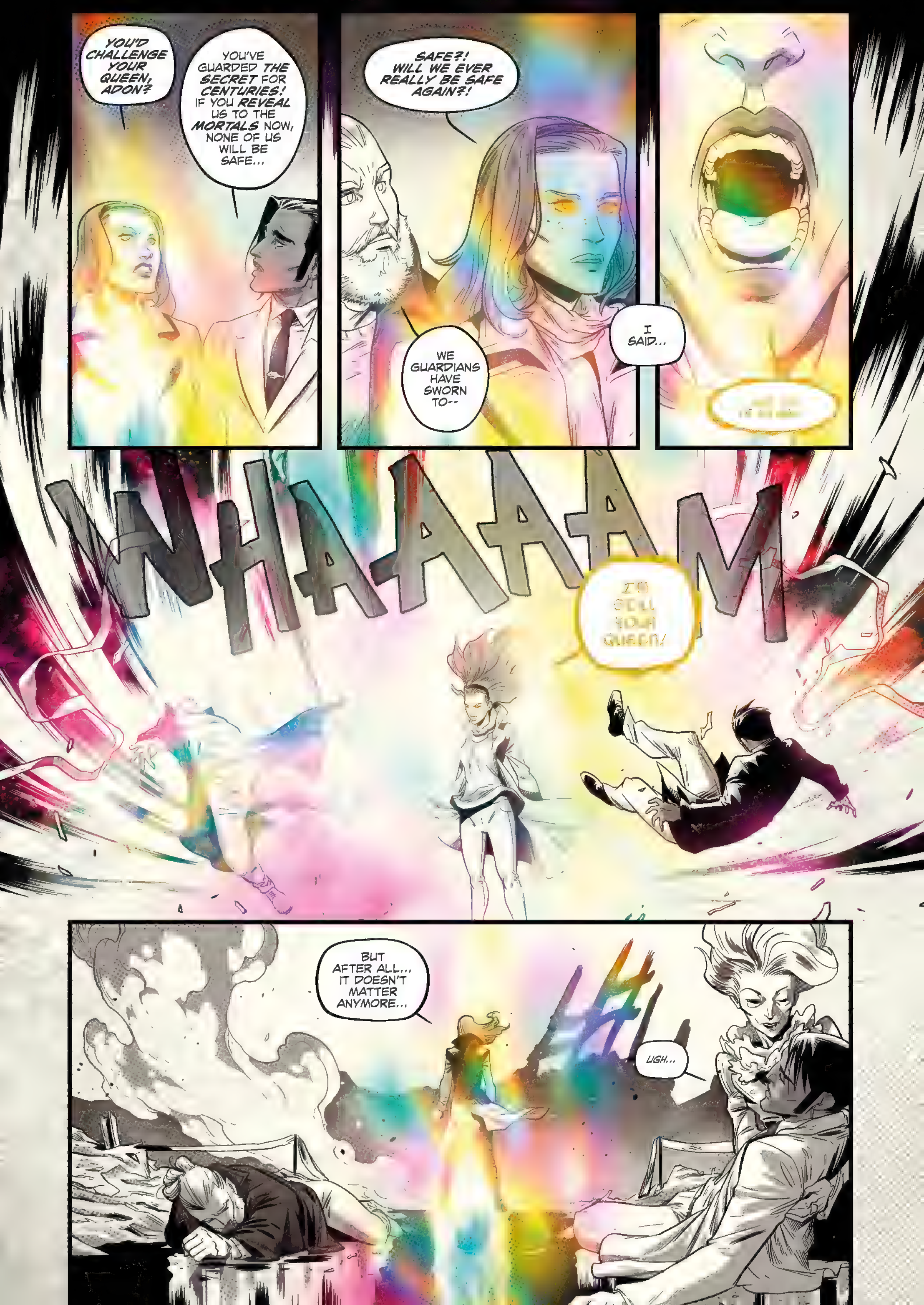

The festivities were born of his magic.
Sweet was the wine that was served by his hands, throbbing was the heart that met his caresses.
His kisses concealed desires of grandeur and unscrupulousness, as vast as the night and as indomitable as storms.
Thanks to them, everyone found the courage for impossible feats.
Like opening gaps into unexplored realities. Or conceiving whole dynasties of heroes with music.
Despite wandering around endlessly, only one place was really his home.
There...where his brothers waited at sunset.

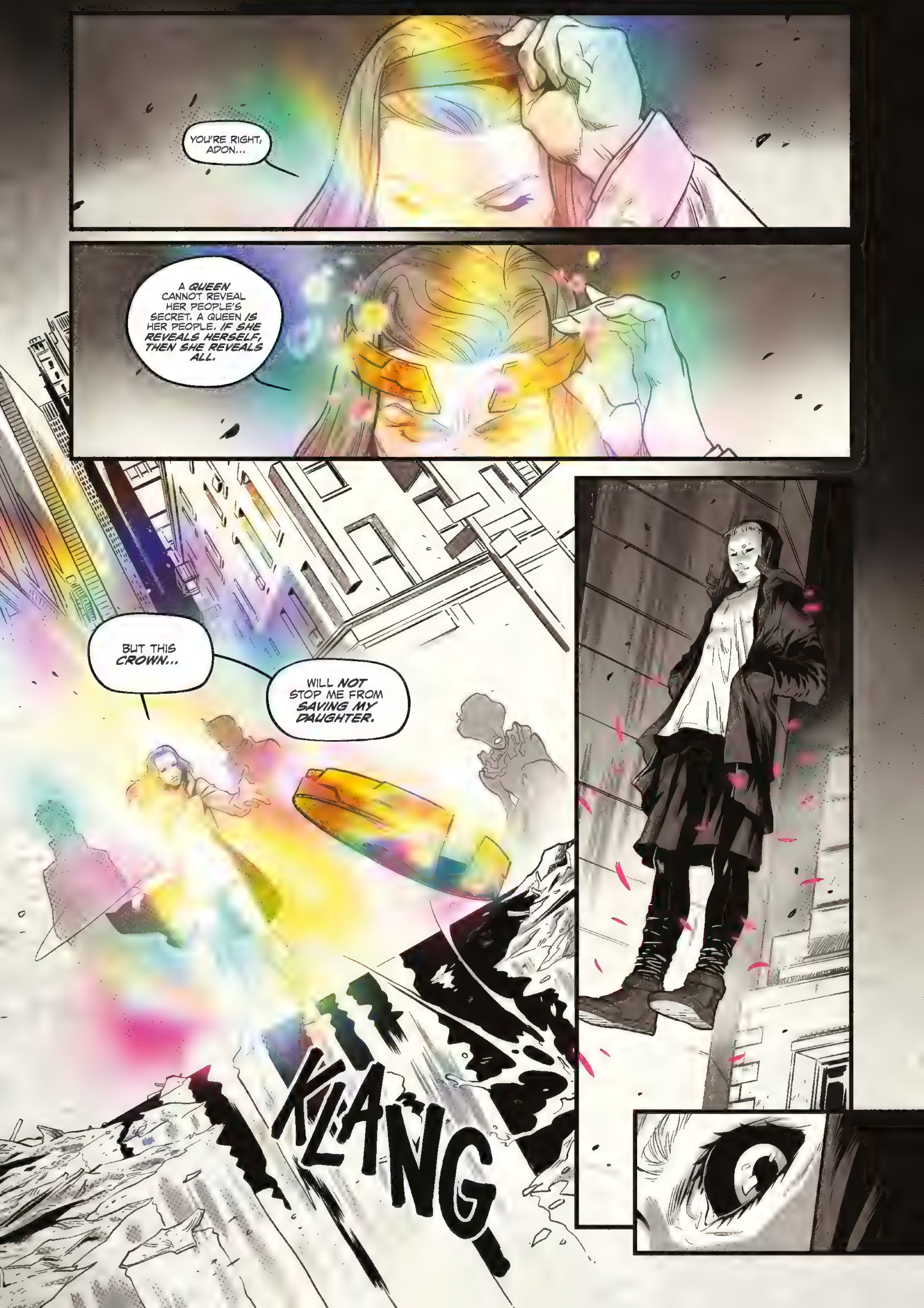

YOU ARE A BIT *LATER* EVERY TIME, BROTHER...
YOU'RE RIGHT, HESUS. BUT WILL I EVER LOVE *ANYONE* LIKE I LOVE OUR *LAND?*
BROTHER... *MEDEA* SAYS THAT THE *MORTAL MEN* OF THIS *EARTH* WILL SOON *TAKE* US AWAY...
COME ON, TEUTATÈS! THE HUMANS? IMPOSSIBLE! THEY'VE HEARTS AS LIGHT AS BUTTERFLIES!
YOU DANCE AROUND THE FIRE WITH THEM ONE NIGHT AND THE NEXT DAY THEY'RE ALREADY OLD AND DYING...
THIS IS THE LAND OF DESIRES, STORIES AND SPELLS...
...HUMANS WILL NEVER TAKE ARCADIA AWAY FROM US.

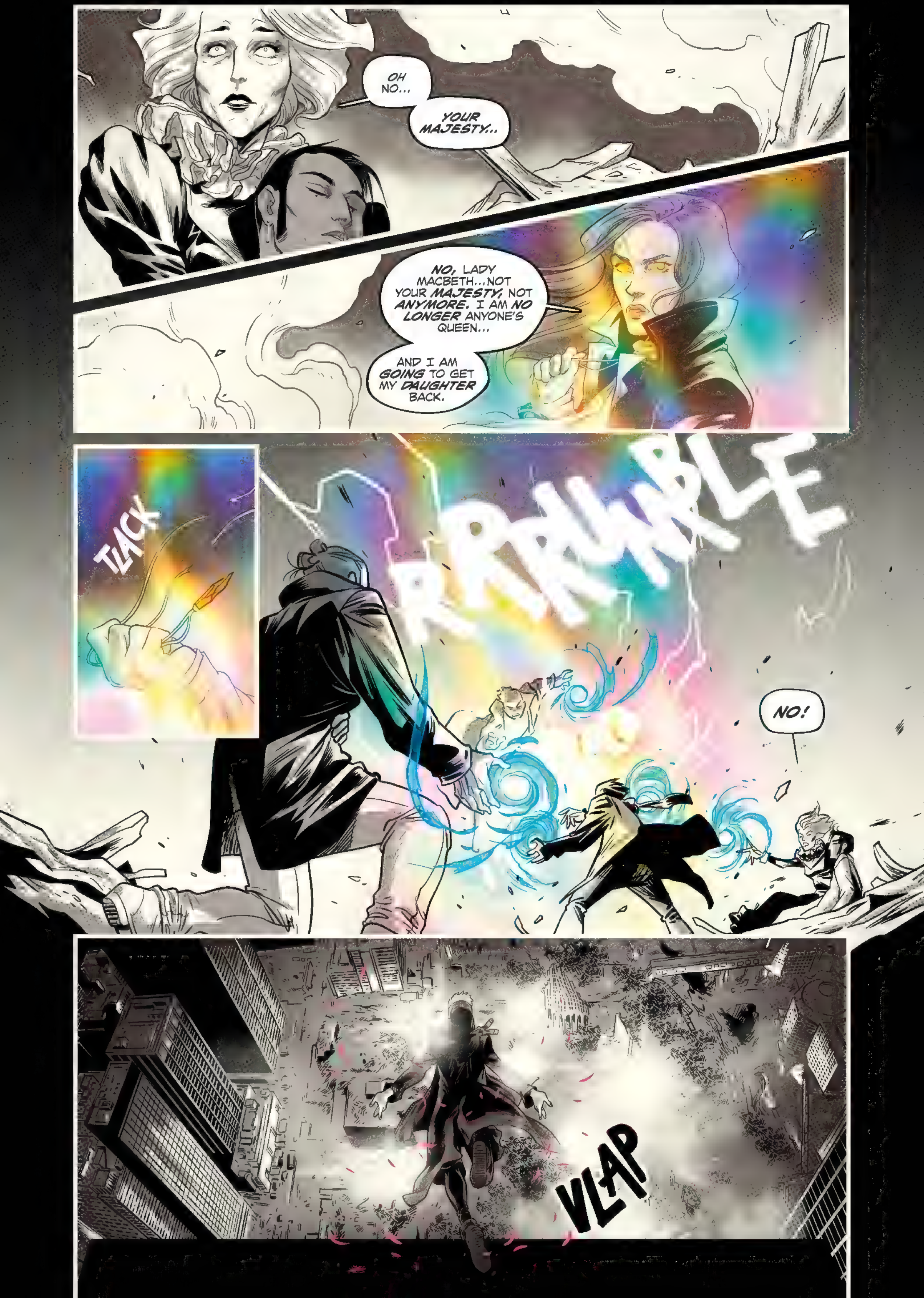

I COULD COMPOSE A SONG ABOUT WHAT YOU FEEL WHEN SOMEONE TEARS AWAY THE *WONDER* FROM YOUR EYES.
MEDEA *TRIED* TO WARN US…BUT WE DIDN'T LISTEN.
PUNISHMENT CAME *GENERATIONS LATER*, HERE IN *MANHATTAN*… AS THE *COLD IRON* STABBED INTO THE EARTH.
I HEARD *DRAGONS* CRYING OUT IN THE DARK, FROM THE *WEIGHT* OF THE *PAIN*.
GOBLINS, QUIVERING IN THEIR DENS…GROUND THEIR TEETH UNTIL THEY *SWALLOWED* THEM.
THE ROAR OF THE TOWERS AND THE CRASHING OF SHATTERED DREAMS *ALL* REACHED MY *EAR*.
IN AN *INSTANT*… THE *BLINK* OF AN EYE…EVERYTHING *CHANGED*.

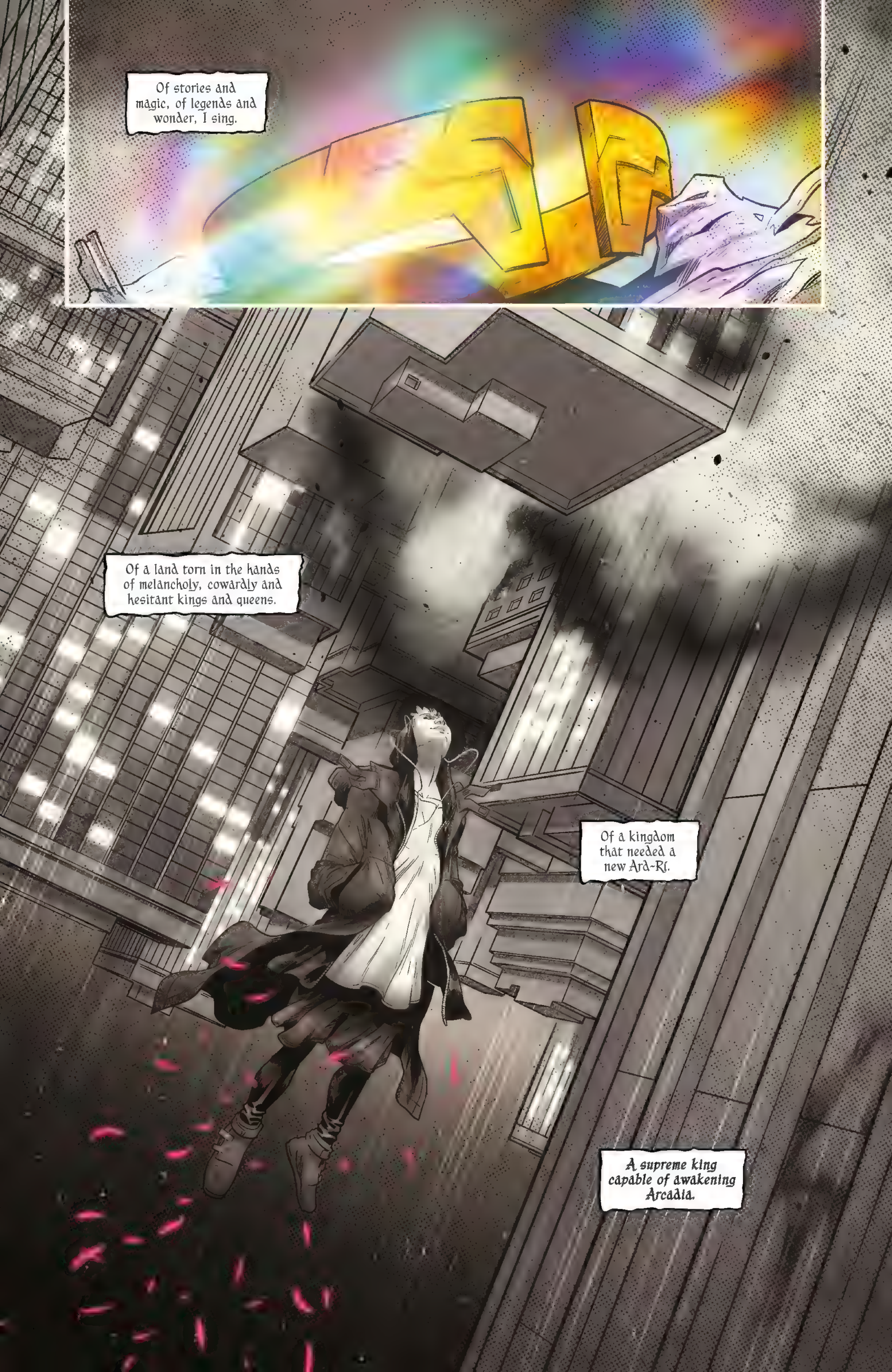

MANHATTAN, 2001.

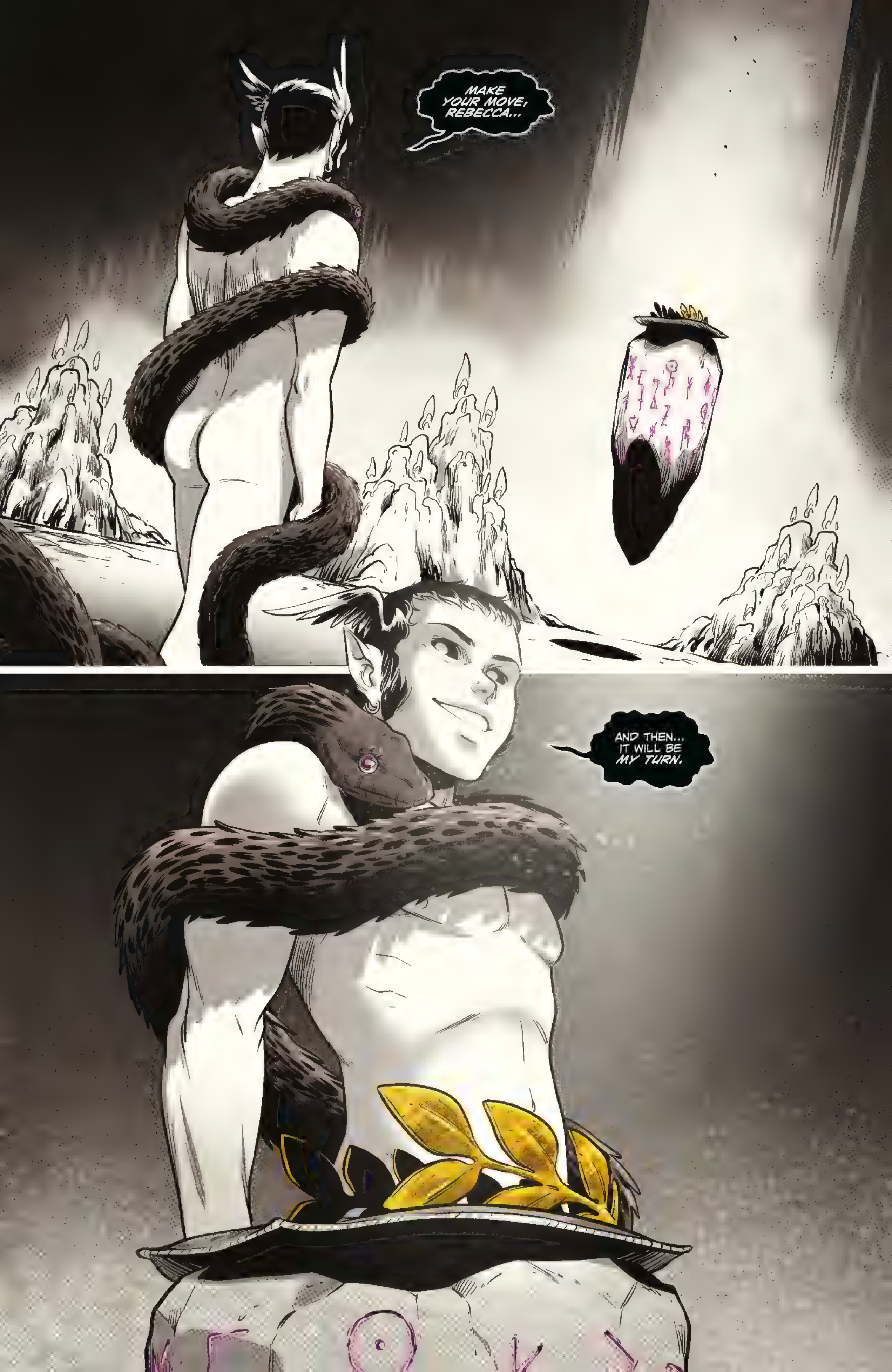

LADDER 113
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO DOESN'T UNDERSTAND! MY DAUGHTER'S DOWN THERE!
MA'AM, YOU... YOU SHOULDN'T EVEN BE HERE...
MORTAL WORM! I WILL TEAR YOUR SKIN OFF! LET ME PASS!
...THE RESCUE OPERAT--
GET OUT OF MY WAY!
YOUR MAJESTY, PLEASE...
THERE ARE JOURNALISTS, YOUR MAJESTY. EYES EVERYWHERE.
SEYFRID... ADON... UNDER THE COLD IRON... THERE'S GUINEVERE, YOUR PRINCESS. IF YOU'VE A SHRED OF HONOR, GET OUT OF THE WAY.
EVERYONE LOVES THE PRINCESS BUT...
...WE CAN'T STAND BY AND WATCH AS YOU DESTROY WHAT YOU'VE FOUGHT SO HARD FOR!

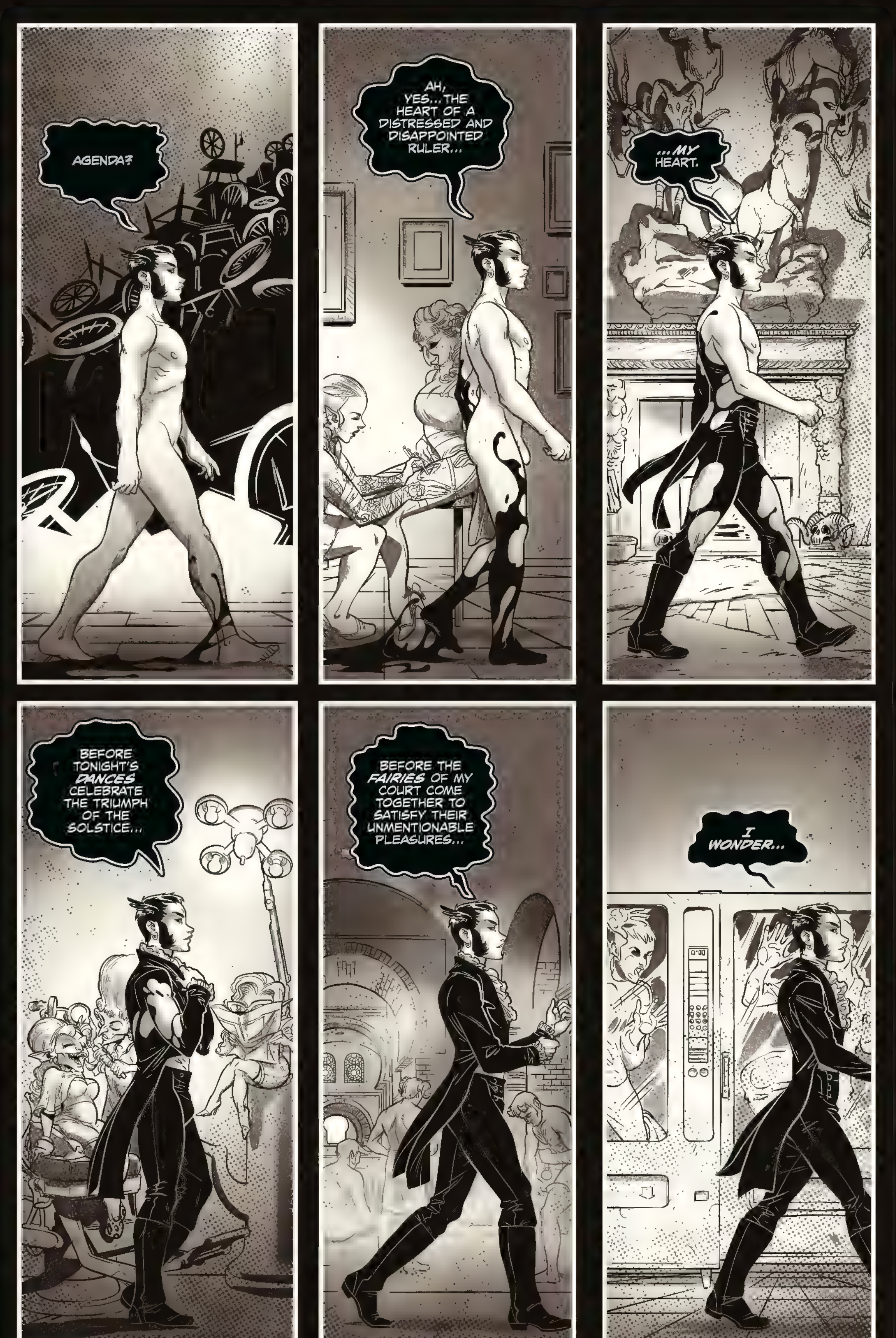

YOU'D CHALLENGE YOUR QUEEN, ADON?
YOU'VE GUARDED THE SECRET FOR CENTURIES! IF YOU REVEAL US TO THE MORTALS NOW, NONE OF US WILL BE SAFE...
SAFE?! WILL WE EVER REALLY BE SAFE AGAIN?!
WE GUARDIANS HAVE SWORN TO--
I SAID...
WHAAAAM
I'M STILL YOUR QUEEN!
BUT AFTER ALL... IT DOESN'T MATTER ANYMORE...
UGH...

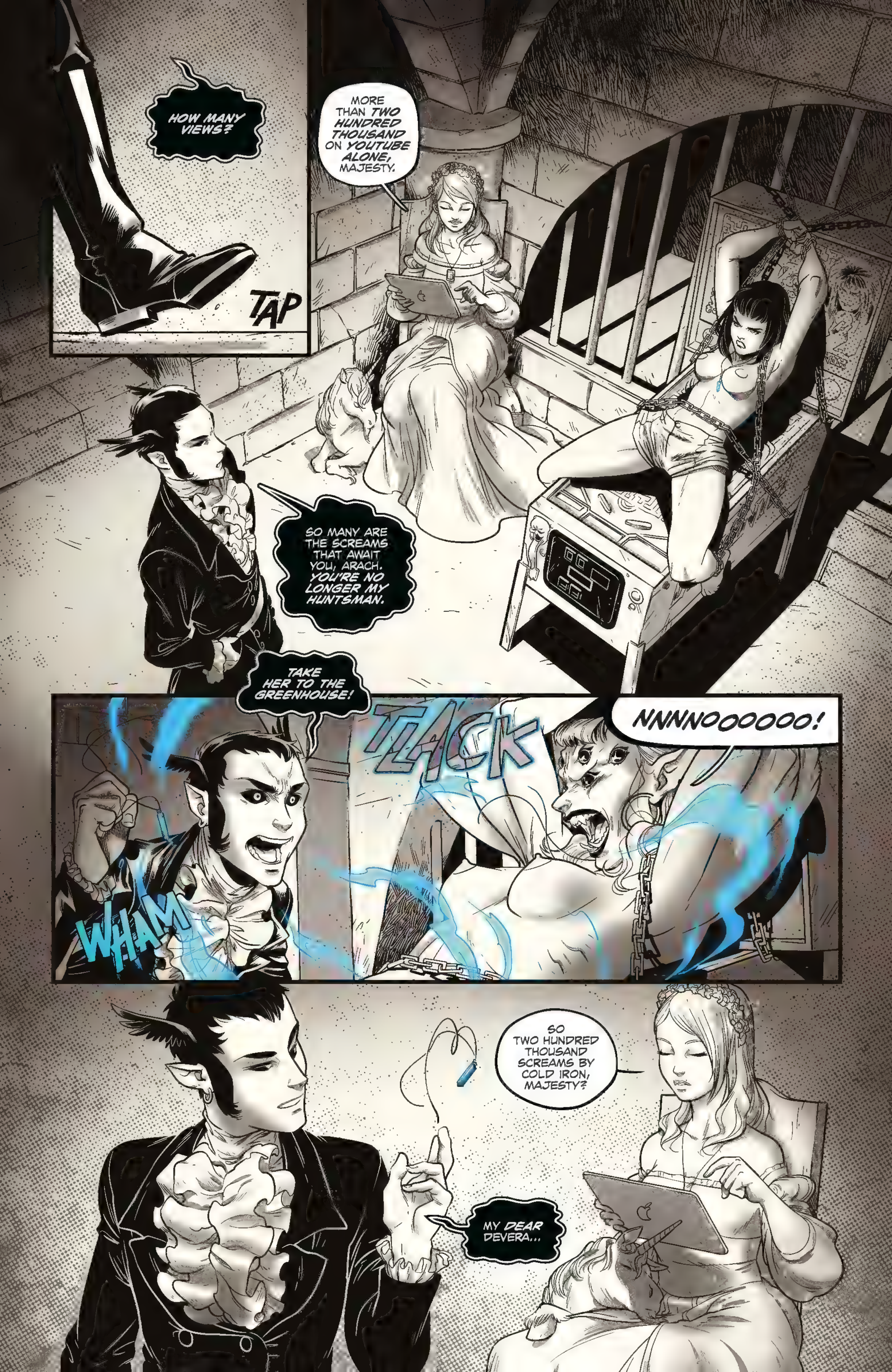

YOU'RE RIGHT, ADON...
A *QUEEN* CANNOT REVEAL HER PEOPLE'S SECRET. A QUEEN *IS* HER PEOPLE. *IF SHE REVEALS HERSELF, THEN SHE REVEALS ALL.*
BUT THIS *CROWN...*
WILL *NOT* STOP ME FROM *SAVING MY DAUGHTER.*
KLANG

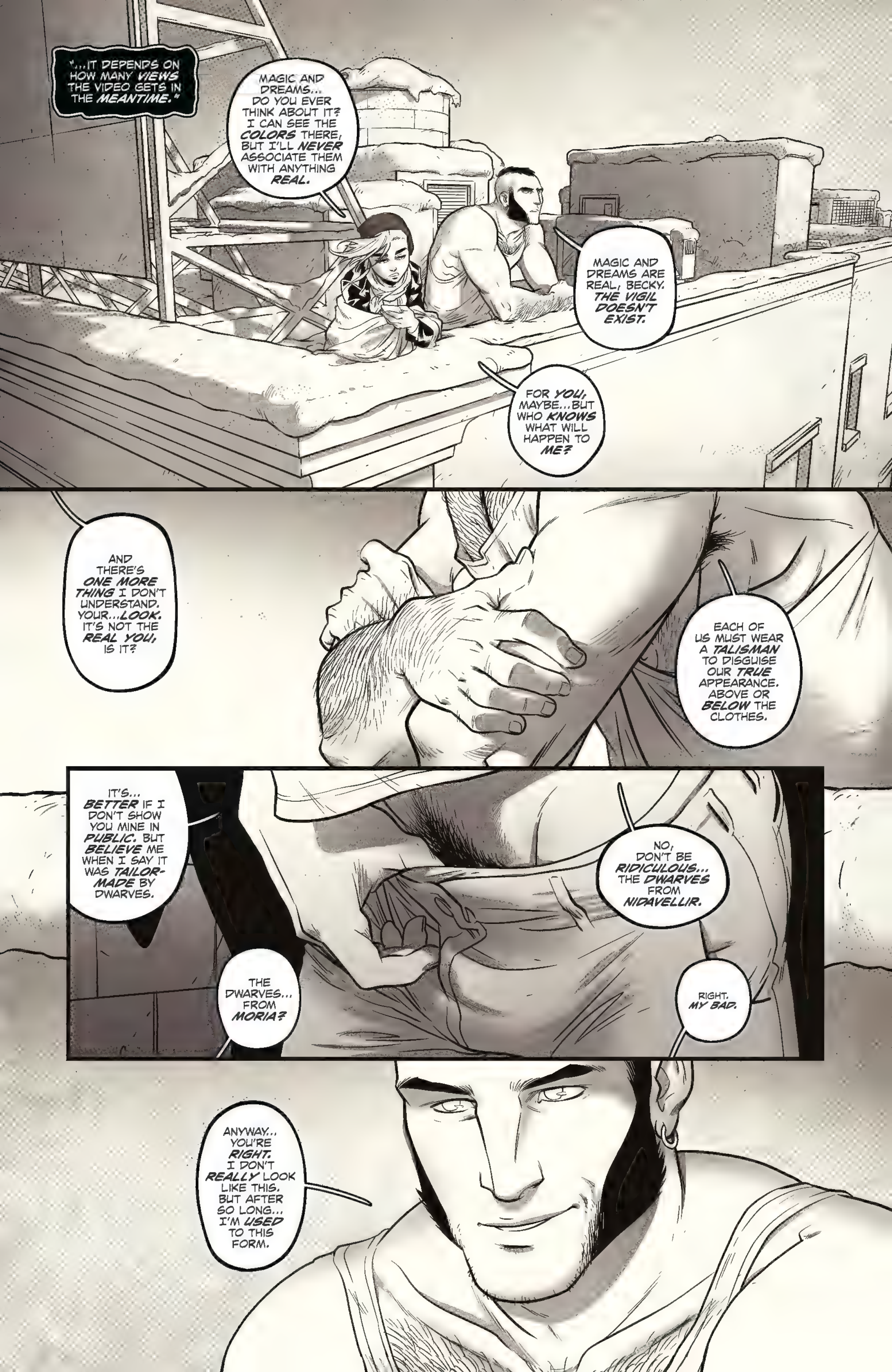

OH NO...
YOUR *MAJESTY*...
NO, LADY MACBETH...NOT YOUR *MAJESTY,* NOT *ANYMORE.* I AM *NO LONGER* ANYONE'S QUEEN...
AND I AM *GOING* TO GET MY *DAUGHTER* BACK.
TZACK
RRRUMBLE
NO!
VLAP

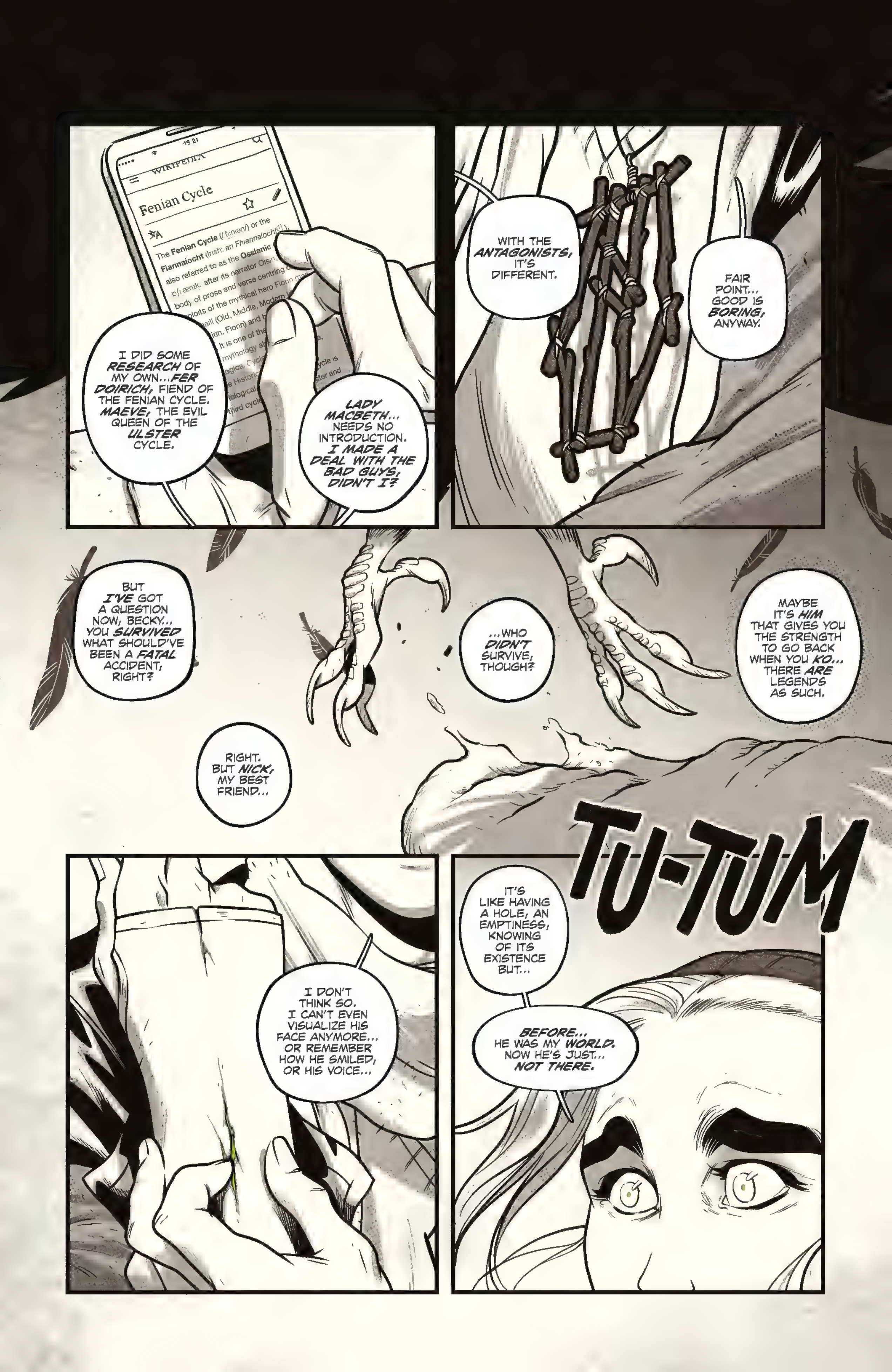

Of stories and magic, of legends and wonder, I sing.
Of a land torn in the hands of melancholy, cowardly and hesitant kings and queens.
Of a kingdom that needed a new Ard-Rí.
A supreme king capable of awakening Arcadia.

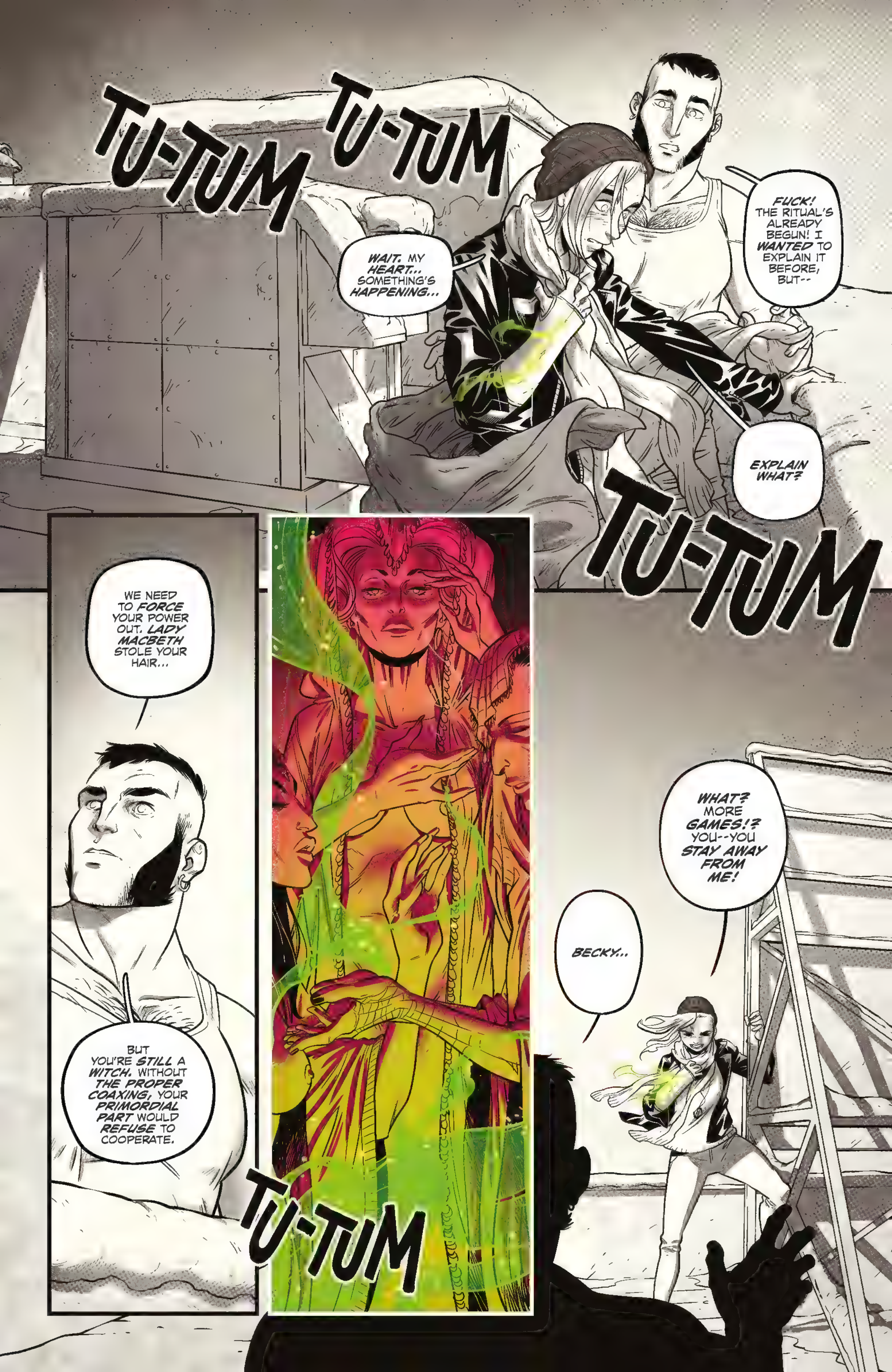

MAKE YOUR MOVE, REBECCA...
AND THEN... IT WILL BE *MY TURN.*

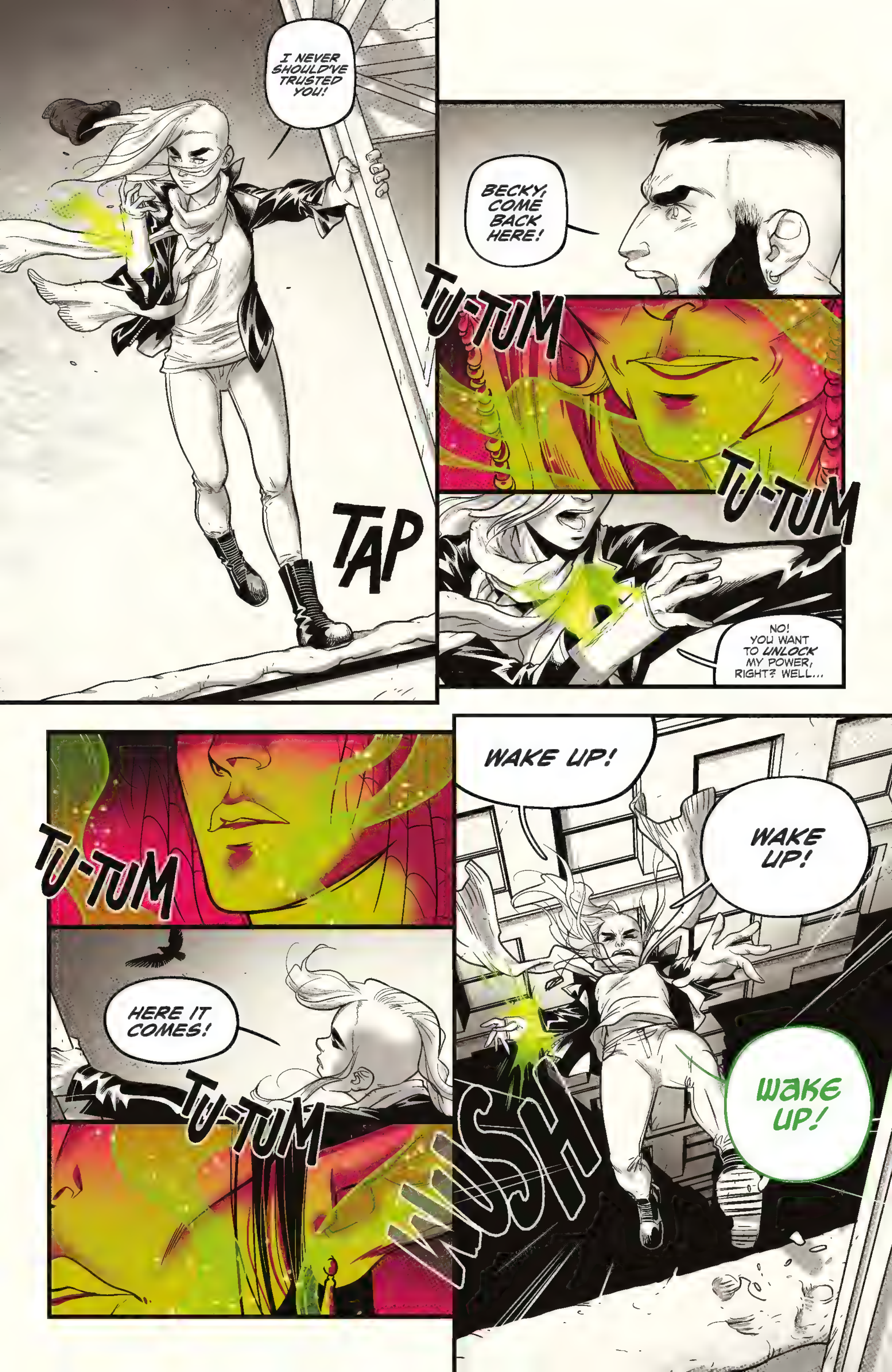

AGENDA?
AH, YES... THE HEART OF A DISTRESSED AND DISAPPOINTED RULER...
...***MY*** HEART.
BEFORE TONIGHT'S ***DANCES*** CELEBRATE THE TRIUMPH OF THE SOLSTICE...
BEFORE THE ***FAIRIES*** OF MY COURT COME TOGETHER TO SATISFY THEIR UNMENTIONABLE PLEASURES...
I WONDER...

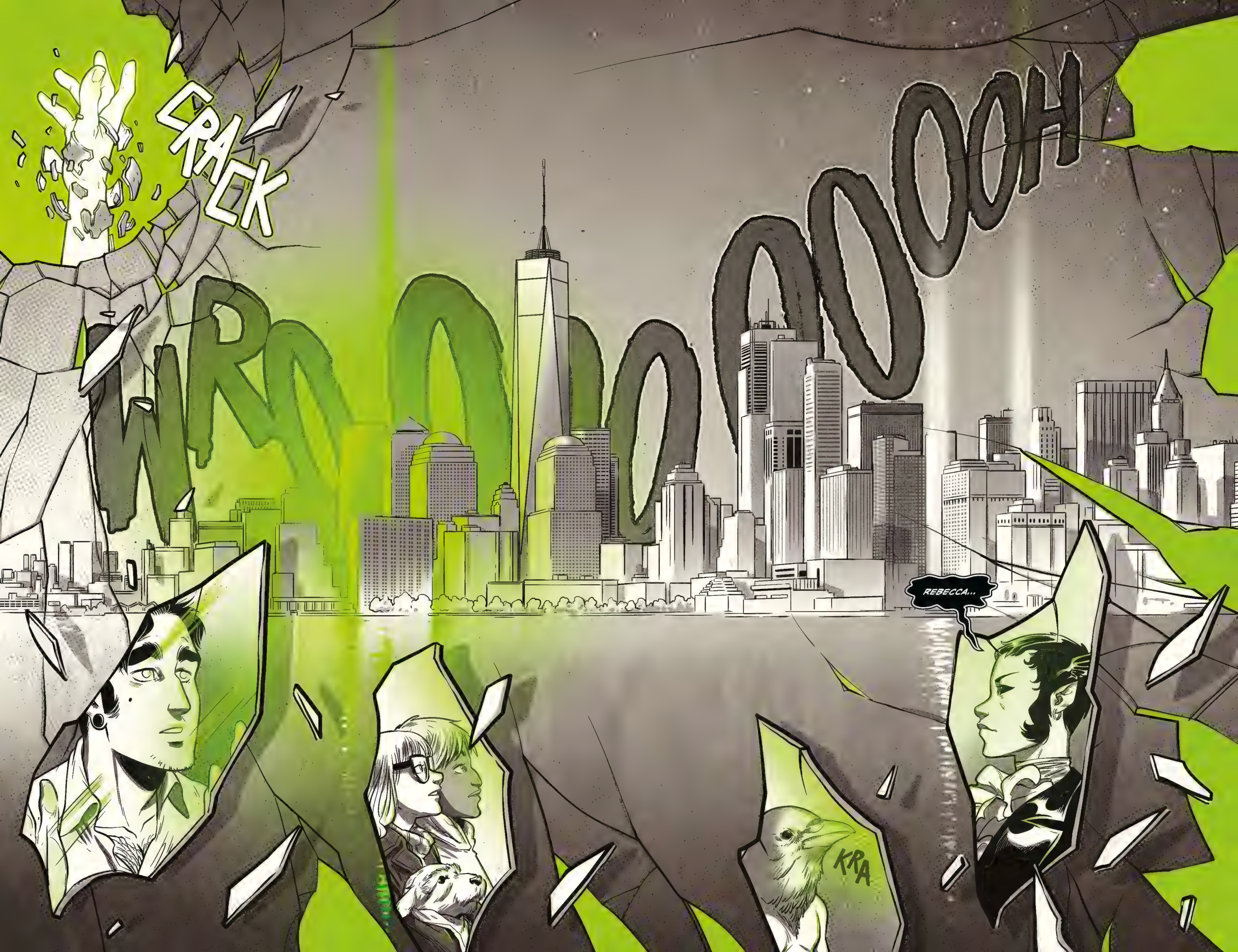

HOW MANY VIEWS?
TAP
MORE THAN TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND ON YOUTUBE ALONE, MAJESTY.
SO MANY ARE THE SCREAMS THAT AWAIT YOU, ARACH. YOU'RE NO LONGER MY HUNTSMAN.
TAKE HER TO THE GREENHOUSE!
TLACK
NNNOOOOOO!
WHAM
SO TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND SCREAMS BY COLD IRON, MAJESTY?
MY DEAR DEVERA...

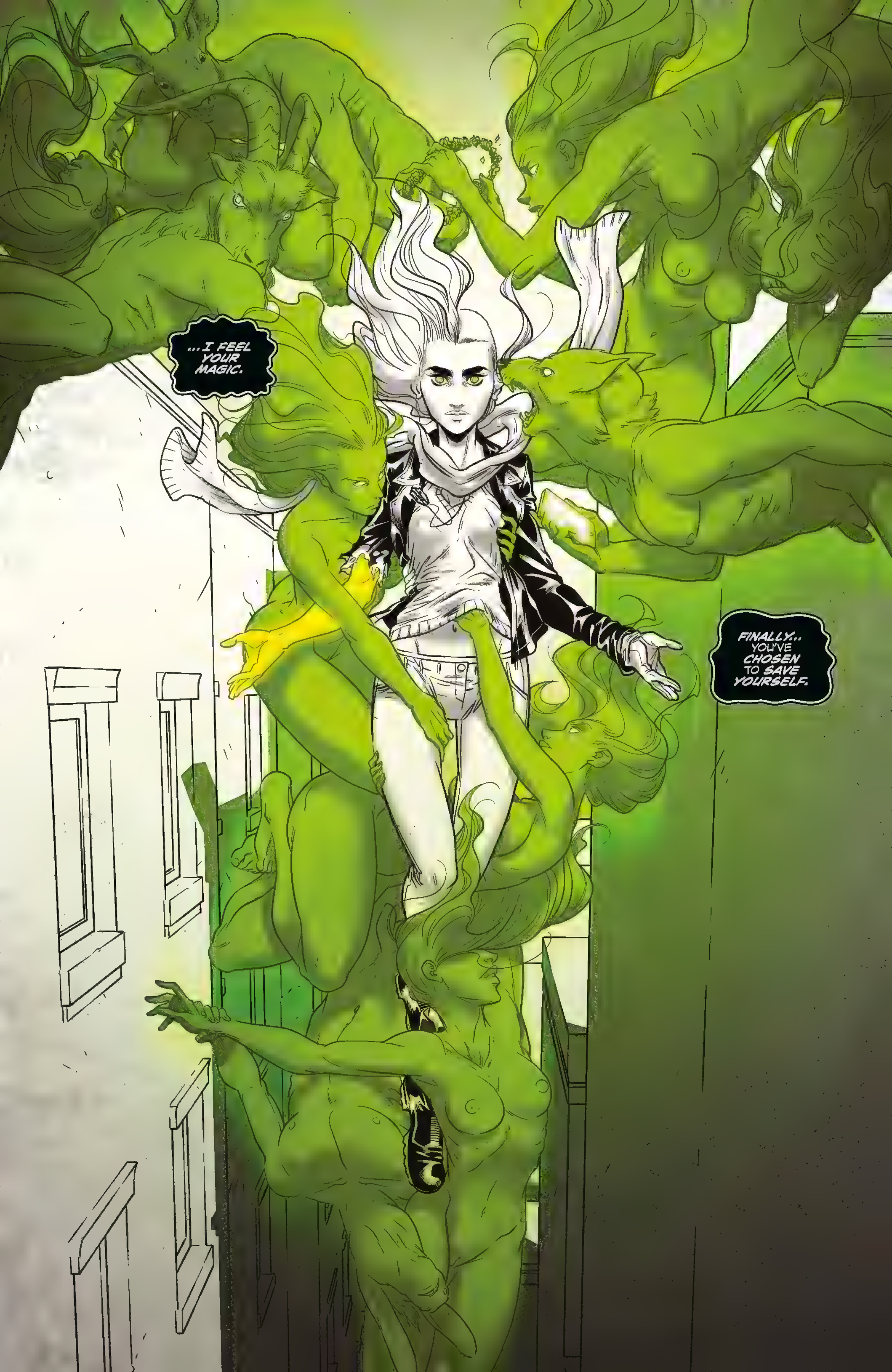

"...IT DEPENDS ON HOW MANY *VIEWS* THE VIDEO GETS IN THE *MEANTIME.*"
MAGIC AND DREAMS... DO YOU EVER THINK ABOUT IT? I CAN SEE THE *COLORS* THERE, BUT I'LL *NEVER* ASSOCIATE THEM WITH ANYTHING *REAL.*
MAGIC AND DREAMS ARE REAL, BECKY. *THE VIGIL DOESN'T EXIST.*
FOR *YOU,* MAYBE...BUT WHO *KNOWS* WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO *ME?*
AND THERE'S *ONE MORE THING* I DON'T UNDERSTAND. YOUR...*LOOK.* IT'S NOT THE *REAL YOU,* IS IT?
EACH OF US MUST WEAR A *TALISMAN* TO DISGUISE OUR *TRUE* APPEARANCE. ABOVE OR *BELOW* THE CLOTHES.
IT'S... *BETTER* IF I DON'T SHOW YOU MINE IN *PUBLIC.* BUT *BELIEVE* ME WHEN I SAY IT WAS *TAILOR-MADE* BY DWARVES.
THE DWARVES... FROM *MORIA?*
NO, DON'T BE *RIDICULOUS...* THE *DWARVES* FROM *NIDAVELLIR.*
RIGHT. *MY BAD.*
ANYWAY... YOU'RE *RIGHT.* I DON'T *REALLY* LOOK LIKE THIS. BUT AFTER SO LONG... I'M *USED* TO THIS FORM.

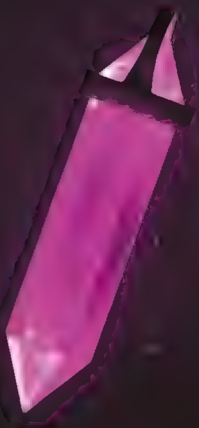

WIKIPEDIA
Fenian Cycle
The Fenian Cycle (Irish: an Fhiannaíocht) or the Fiannaíocht
also referred to as the Ossianic
after its narrator Oisín
body of prose and verse centring
exploits of the mythical hero Fionn
I DID SOME RESEARCH OF MY OWN...FER DOIRICH, FIEND OF THE FENIAN CYCLE. MAEVE, THE EVIL QUEEN OF THE ULSTER CYCLE.
LADY MACBETH... NEEDS NO INTRODUCTION. I MADE A DEAL WITH THE BAD GUYS, DIDN'T I?
WITH THE ANTAGONISTS, IT'S DIFFERENT.
FAIR POINT... GOOD IS BORING, ANYWAY.
BUT I'VE GOT A QUESTION NOW, BECKY... YOU SURVIVED WHAT SHOULD'VE BEEN A FATAL ACCIDENT, RIGHT?
...WHO DIDN'T SURVIVE, THOUGH?
MAYBE IT'S HIM THAT GIVES YOU THE STRENGTH TO GO BACK WHEN YOU KO... THERE ARE LEGENDS AS SUCH.
RIGHT. BUT NICK, MY BEST FRIEND...
TU-TUM
I DON'T THINK SO. I CAN'T EVEN VISUALIZE HIS FACE ANYMORE... OR REMEMBER HOW HE SMILED, OR HIS VOICE...
IT'S LIKE HAVING A HOLE, AN EMPTINESS, KNOWING OF ITS EXISTENCE BUT...
BEFORE... HE WAS MY WORLD. NOW HE'S JUST... NOT THERE.


TU-TUM
TU-TUM
WAIT. MY HEART... SOMETHING'S HAPPENING...
FUCK! THE RITUAL'S ALREADY BEGUN! I WANTED TO EXPLAIN IT BEFORE, BUT--
EXPLAIN WHAT?
TU-TUM
WE NEED TO FORCE YOUR POWER OUT. LADY MACBETH STOLE YOUR HAIR...
BUT YOU'RE STILL A WITCH. WITHOUT THE PROPER COAXING, YOUR PRIMORDIAL PART WOULD REFUSE TO COOPERATE.
TU-TUM
WHAT? MORE GAMES!? YOU--YOU STAY AWAY FROM ME!
BECKY...


I NEVER SHOULD'VE TRUSTED YOU!
BECKY, COME BACK HERE!
TU-TUM
TU-TUM
TAP
NO! YOU WANT TO UNLOCK MY POWER, RIGHT? WELL...
TU-TUM
HERE IT COMES!
TU-TUM
WAKE UP!
WAKE UP!
WAKE UP!
WUSH


CRACK
WROOOOOOOOOH
REBECCA...
KRA


...I FEEL YOUR MAGIC.
FINALLY... YOU'VE CHOSEN TO SAVE YOURSELF.

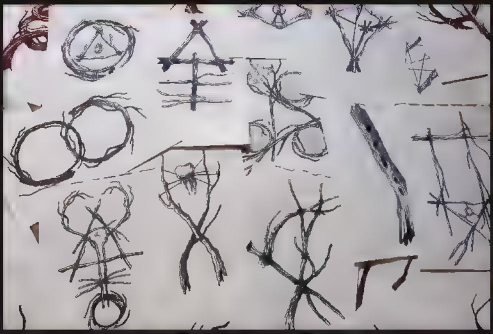


WHAT IS THE SECRET?

or *How I learned to stop worrying by admitting that magic is real.*

An afterword by Marco B. Bucci

Magic is real: It's a phrase that I often repeat to myself, every day, in the most disparate moments. It helps me to overcome every obstacle, to turn around, to break it down into small parts. Magic is real, but it's also hidden and elusive, almost inaccessible. **Every gesture can become sacred, every word can invoke its strength, everything can become its symbol.** But to succeed we must overcome a veil of lies and mysteries, of illusions and ambiguity.



That's why I decided to write this story and that's why you've come to it. ***Nomen Omen* speaks of esoteric traditions, magical practices, supernatural creatures and how these affect the lives of those who practice Art.** And obviously it also speaks to the most devastating powers of Witches and Sorcerers, that of giving a name to something or someone to have power and control over its destiny. It's scary, isn't it? The power I mean. I've always been terrified by it. It was the part that frightened me the most in my journey. To have control over me and therefore also over the reality that surrounds me.

Becky is a bit like the daughter I wanted to protect from the truth. I wanted to tell a story of sentimental intrigues, of adventure, and perhaps also of love, why not? But reality is different from how it is represented. Becky is a special girl, it's true, but she will have to face trials much bigger than her. I wanted to keep the horror, loss and grief away from her. All the death that from the beginning fills the pages of *Nomen Omen*. But I can't. **Narrators are so unique in story, and wield such power. We are like mediums engaged in seances that never end.** Intermediaries between the world of the reader and the listener and the dreamy reality of all that has not yet been told.

This will be a cruel story, as you might have noticed already. Everyone is in danger, even when it doesn't seem so, because all the magic has an unexpected price. That's how it works, but we can't take a step backwards for that. **After all, Becky is the only girl I know to have three mothers.** One that carried her in her belly for a long time, one that gave her to the light and another that was always close to her. It's not surprising that this is the case. Myth is studded with peculiar births. Is it not true that Zeus carried out the gestation of Dionysus within his thigh? Not to mention that he had recently given birth to Athena from his head, thanks to a blow from Hephaestus' two-headed axe. **Special families have always existed and it's often from those that the greatest heroes come.**

Of course, it's strange to think that a nerdy girl who has an internship at Google and keeps a visual diary of her dreams on Instagram can become a real hero. This may not be her role. Certainly not the one she chose! But here it's no longer a question of what I want or what she wants.

This series is a group ritual. Every time you turn its pages, each chapter you patiently collect brings you closer to the very meaning of Magic. The real one that changed my life. That's why I welcome you here in this space beyond **The Secret.** Just a few warnings before moving on to other pressing matters. Never abandon the path, beware of what is too good to be true and never leave my hand after the sun has set.

But above all, please, pay attention to the Names. To give them, to accept them, to repeat them. Your life is at stake.

OTHER PRESSING MATTERS

If you've read the book already (and if you're reading this my best guess is you have) you understand, or you are beginning to understand, what the point of the situation is. **Supernatural creatures that instead of profile pictures on social networks wear a crystal that modifies their appearance in the human world.** It's not just illusions but a concrete presence. Their interaction with places, things or other living beings is conditioned by this avatar. The parallelism with the online world is obvious but in reality it has a much more rooted origin in my personal history.

Maybe one day I will tell you about the fact that as a child I could see things that should not be seen. I didn't talk about it with my peers, on the contrary, I was ashamed of it. **It's in this separation between secrets and revelations, unmentionable truths and potential lies, that the supernatural world moves.** Masks, avatars, profiles, illusions, identity. Here's what the walls of the labyrinth are made of, a maze which keeps the presence of non-human creatures hidden within an apparently conquered, explained and solved world.

Those who are not human know that everything begins with names. **To define something means to know it. That's why legends exist. To pass on a truth that can only be told through a fantasy patina.** And that's why in *Nomen Omen* you'll find so many strange names. Some are just what remains of the original names, others are joined together, others are anagrams or simply crippled by magic. This is how you protect yourself from something, or how you control it. When I found myself describing the Wild Hunt of King Taranis I first found the supernatural creatures that hide behind illusions, then I had to change their names and finally imagine their avatars. It may seem strange but every part of *Nomen Omen* follows a specific ritual.

If you were a creature of thousands of years, who would you look like? What age would you be? Would you wear clothes that are fashionable or similar to those in the country where your legend has spread? Would you choose a face from a billboard or an old photo found in the attic of a stranger? Would you look like someone very famous or would you rather prefer completely anonymous features? **The answers to these questions are in my Hunters.** They are as dangerous as they are complex. Fruit of the game of names, of the great dance of identities. All liars in an urban and mortal reality that barely exists for them. Almost like a dream, or something abstract. Profiles that float on the net. **Just like us.**

THIS IS PERSONAL

I grew up in Italy in the 80s, being a few years younger than the kids on *Stranger Things*. A nerd without other nerds nearby. I was a strange child with red hair who didn't play football and rest assured not playing soccer in Italy in the 80s was definitely strange.

There was no Secret for me as I was born in the Vigil… but I kept a very special one. In fact, I never talked about the creatures that surrounded me when I was alone in the garden. I didn't pronounced their names, I didn't tell their stories and above all I didn't list the rules I had to follow to be able to see them. **I was strange, but not so strange as to reveal to everyone that I could see the fairies.** Indeed, I don't think I've ever done it publicly, not like I'm doing it now on these pages. I've seen them for years and I still can't explain those first questions related to mystery and magic. I still remember when I heard a classmate speak about ghosts. He had seen one inside an abandoned house and he told that to me. I didn't believe him, because ***admitting*** I believed him seemed too foolish at that time. I could not tell him that I too had seen things I could not explain. I left him alone, wearing a ring of doubt that I knew oh so well. That'd be the doubts that comes from the fear of being wrong, of having misinterpreted the world or of being a liar despite everything. It was terribly cruel, if not unjust. **I was afraid of being like him: one who is not believed.**

Fortunately, in my family we relied, more or less consciously, on witchcraft. This was decisive for the child who did not play soccer. At least I could try talking to someone about what I saw in the garden. Of course, confessing everything to an old aunt was not like talking about it with the best friend or the neighbor of my same age. Still it was very important. **Thanks to that little corner of "truth" I never felt really wrong, not entirely anyway.**

The oldest women in my family never used the word "magic". The word was considered an inconvenient bearer of bad luck. So we used to call it many different things in order to avoid of being heard by those "things" that carry small and big misfortunes or follow you in dreams. Grandmothers and Aunts did not use certain names especially in front of me, because I was a sleepwalker, and it was even more dangerous. **Knowing that anything could exist, even things generally considered impossible, helped me accept any kind of person.** Becky is an awful lot like me in this regard.

She read everything and played with everything and part of her firmly believes that there is something true in the stories created by imagination. She's passionate about fantasy novels, comics and video games. She plays role-playing games, shares her passion for MMOs with her friends and has been a cosplayer at nerd events several times. For her, the revelation of a supernatural world is nothing but a confirmation. **An answer to a question that she never dared to ask.**

nomen.omen

Becky's Auguries

Every time Becky dreams she
finds a word waiting for her.
She keeps a diary of her dreams
on **Instagram** and she updates it as
her life becomes more and more
crazy and dangerous.

"Fight"

SEE YOU IN HELL
TOOL

"Tool"

"Heart"

"Past"

Every dream could be a revelation about
what the future holds for her!

Her story could be mine or yours, it doesn't matter. We'll all need answers, sooner or later, like the ones Fer, Lady Macbeth and Maeve gave to her. Little nuggets of truth that help us understand, and then tell to others, what magic really is.

COVER GALLERY

Issue 1 Variant by OLIVIER COIPEL
Colors by Dave Stewart

Issue 1 Variant by BECKY CLOONAN

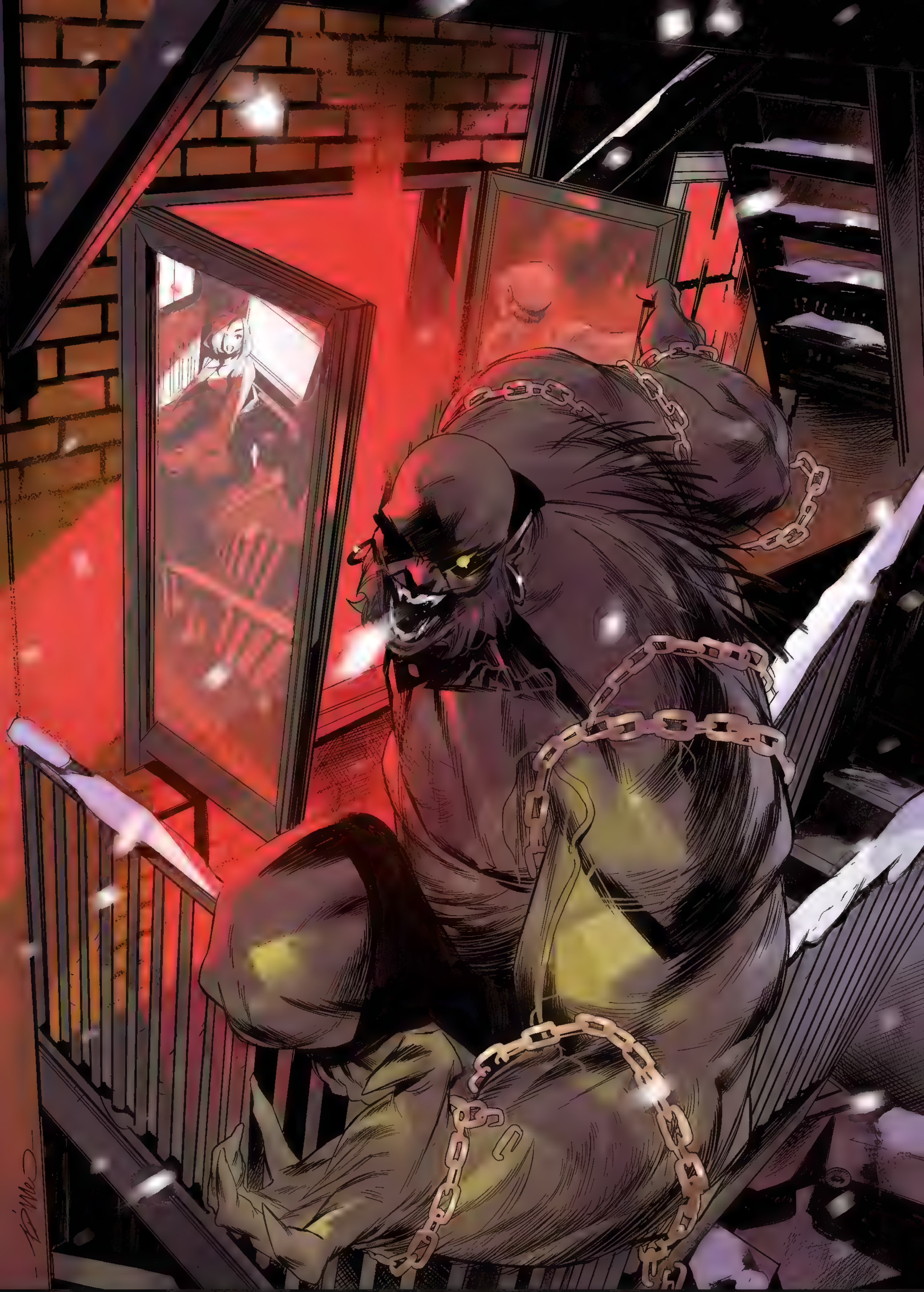
DAVID LOPEZ

Issue 2 Variant by DAVID LOPEZ

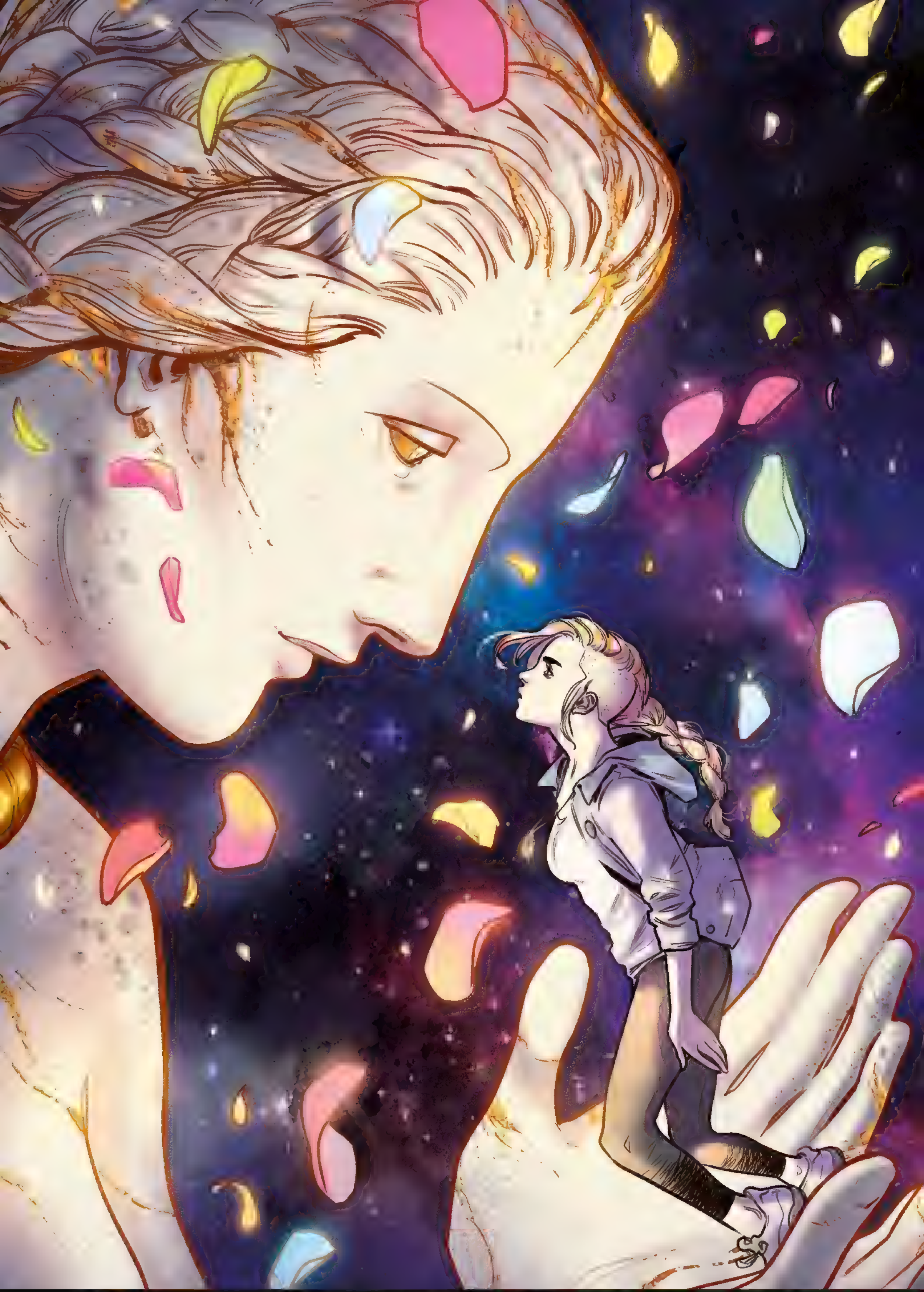
LAFUENTE 2019

Issue 2 Variant by DAVID LAFUENTE
Colors by German Garcia

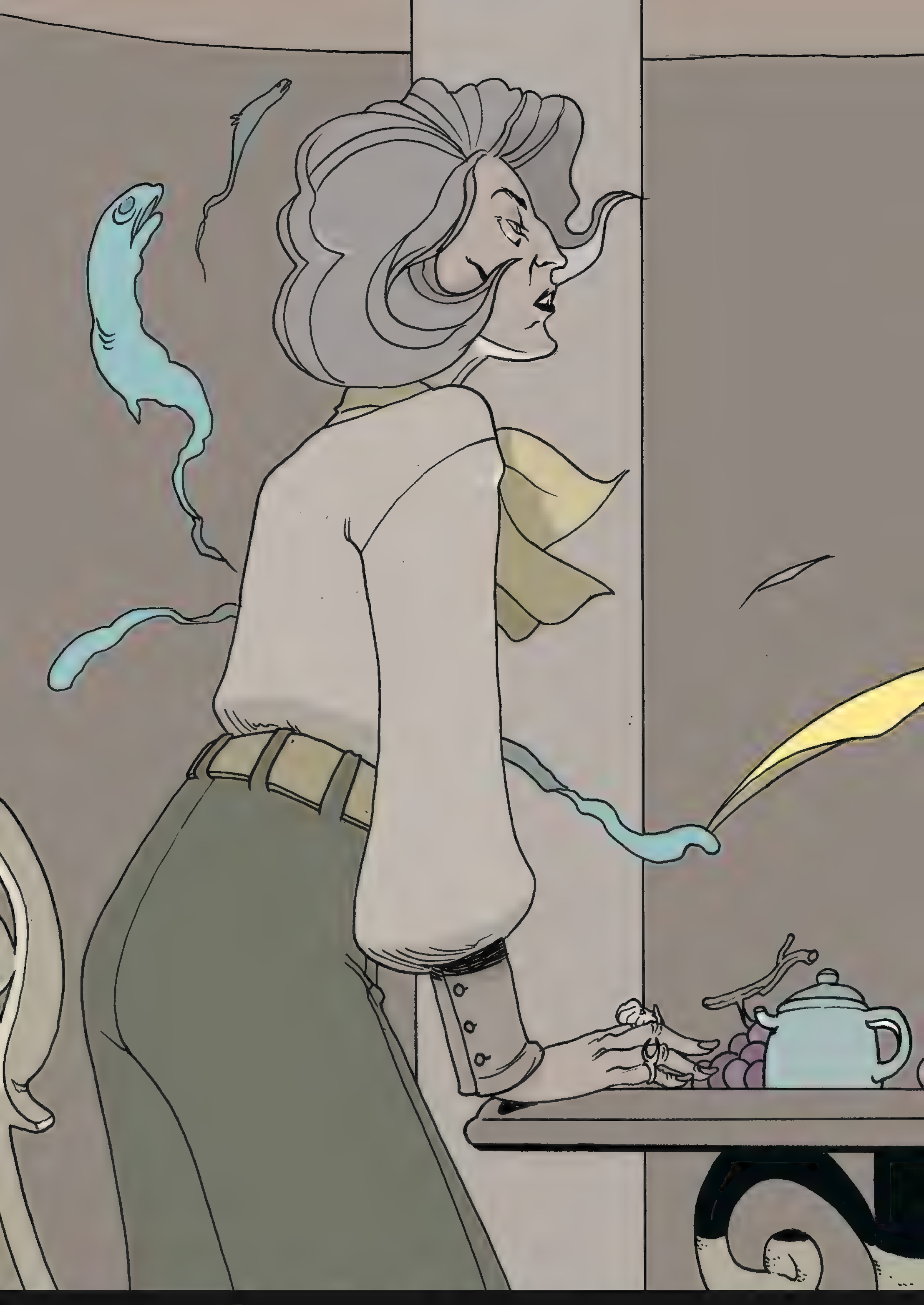
Issue 3 Variant by SARA PICHELLI
Colors by Giovanna Niro



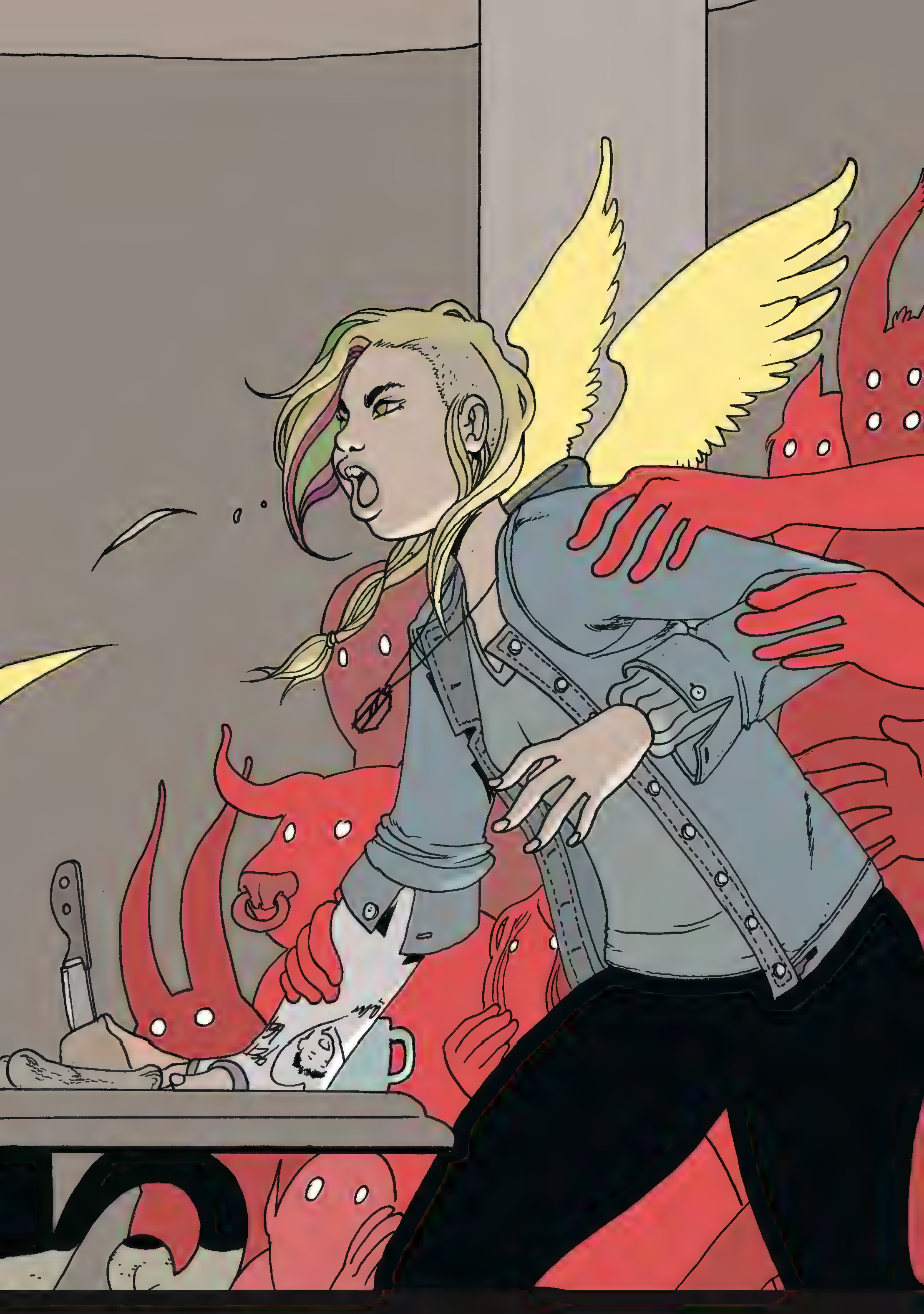
Issue 3 Variant by SIMONE DI MEO



Issue 4 Variant by MATTEO LOLLI
Colors by Stefano Martinuz



Issue 4 Variant by BRANDON GRAHAM



Issue 5 Variant by MAHMUD A. ASRAR
Colors by Matt Wilson

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WAKE
UP

Issue 5 Variant by MARCO B. BUCCI

BIOS

Jacopo Camagni has been working in the comics and illustration industry for over twenty years. In 1998, he drew an original graphic novel dedicated to *Lupin the 3rd* under the supervision of the late Monkey Punch, creator of the character. Ten years later, he began working for Marvel Comics. Since then he's lent his art to some of the most famous characters of the Marvel Universe, such as Longshot, Hawkeye, Deadpool, Deadpool the Duck, the X-Men and Kanan from the *Star Wars* franchise.

Marco B. Bucci, born in 1981, represents a new breed of storyteller. Photographer, designer, illustrator and writer, in 2004 he founded Studio Dronio with Jacopo Camagni, with whom he created *Magna Veritas*, a comic book series published by Soleil in France in 2005. He also wrote the backstory of *Dogs of War*, a CMON Ltd boardgame, and co-created the tabletop RPG *Memento Mori*. In 2018 he co-wrote *Codex Gigas*, a *Memento Mori* companion book that serves as a full-fledged grimoire as well. Today, he juggles his work as a photographer for prestigious fashion labels with his artistic role in the production of role-playing game manuals, and with his work writing comics and novels.

BECKY KUMAR HAS BEEN MARKED FOR DEATH.

After surviving a devastating accident that claimed the life of her best friend, twenty-one-year-old Becky finds herself imbued with new power, purpose, and vision. But the aftermath of her brush with death has left Becky literally heartless, and as she becomes embroiled in a mythical war at the veil between her reality in present-day New York City and an ancient realm of otherworldly truths, she'll find it's only a matter of time before her past catches up with her.

From writer and RPG creator MARCO B. BUCCI (*Magna Veritas*, *Memento Mori*) and artist JACOPO CAMAGNI (*X-Men Blue*, *Deadpool the Duck*, *Strikeforce*) comes a sensational tale of witchcraft and secrecy that rewrites the rules of urban fantasy.

"The urban fantasy series I didn't know I wanted."
—*Horror DNA*

"This comic is not only beautiful, but it's also scary and intriguing."
—*The Pop Break*

"A fascinating story and gorgeous artwork."
—*Multiversity Comics*

"This is not a reading experience to be taken lightly."
—*Comic Watch*

Collects NOMEN OMEN #1–5
HORROR / FANTASY
Rated **M** / Mature

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I AM DOOM. DESTROYER OF WORLDS...
WHAT GODS DARE STAND AGAINST ME?